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PASSING OF THE
THIRD FLOOR BACK



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Scene from the Play "PASSING OF THE THIRD FLOOR BACK."

PASSING OF THE THIRD FLOOR BACK

BY
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AUTHOR OF
PAUL KELVER, THREE MEN IN A BOAT,
ETC., ETC.



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PASSING OF THE THIRD FLOOR BACK

THE neighbourhood of Bloomsbury Square towards four o'clock of a November afternoon is not so crowded as to secure to the stranger, of appearance anything out of the common, immunity from observation. Tibb's boy, screaming at the top of his voice that *she* was his honey, stopped suddenly, stepped backwards on to the toes of a voluble young lady wheeling a perambulator, and remained deaf, apparently, to the somewhat personal remarks of the voluble young lady. Not until he had reached the next corner—and then more as a soliloquy than as information to the street—did Tibb's boy recover sufficient interest in his own affairs to remark that *he* was her bee. The

voluble young lady herself, following some half-a-dozen yards behind, forgot her wrongs in contemplation of the stranger's back. There was this that was peculiar about the stranger's back: that instead of being flat it presented a decided curve. "It ain't a 'ump, and it don't look like kervitcher of the spine," observed the voluble young lady to herself. "Blimy if I don't believe 'e's taking 'ome 'is washing up his back."

The constable at the corner, trying to seem busy doing nothing, noticed the stranger's approach with gathering interest. "That's an odd sort of a walk of yours, young man," thought the constable. "You take care you don't fall down and tumble over yourself."

"Thought he was a young man," murmured the constable, the stranger having passed him. "He had a young face right enough."

The daylight was fading. The stranger, finding it impossible to read the name of the street upon the corner house, turned back.

"Why, 'tis a young man," the constable told himself; "a mere boy."

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger; "but would you mind telling me my way to Bloomsbury Square?"

"This is Bloomsbury Square," explained the constable; "leastways round the corner is. What number might you be wanting?"

The stranger took from the ticket pocket of his tightly buttoned overcoat a piece of paper, unfolded it and read it out: "Mrs. Pennycherry. Number Forty-eight."

"Round to the left," instructed him the constable; "fourth house. Been recommended there?"

"By—by a friend," replied the stranger. "Thank you very much."

"Ah," muttered the constable to himself; "guess you won't be calling him that by the end of the week, young—"

"Funny," added the constable, gazing after the retreating figure of the stranger. "Seen plenty of the other sex as looked young behind and old in

front. This cove looks young in front and old behind. Guess he'll look old all round if he stops long at mother Penny-cherry's: stingy old cat."

Constables whose beat included Bloomsbury Square had their reasons for not liking Mrs. Pennycherry. Indeed it might have been difficult to discover any human being with reasons for liking that sharp-featured lady. Maybe the keeping of second-rate boarding houses in the neighbourhood of Bloomsbury does not tend to develop the virtues of generosity and amiability.

Meanwhile the stranger, proceeding upon his way, had rung the bell of Number Forty-eight. Mrs. Pennycherry, peeping from the area and catching a glimpse, above the railings, of a handsome if somewhat effeminate masculine face, hastened to readjust her widow's cap before the looking-glass while directing Mary Jane to show the stranger, should he prove a problematical boarder, into the dining-room, and to light the gas.

“ And don’t stop gossiping, and don’t you take it upon yourself to answer questions. Say I’ll be up in a minute,” were Mrs. Pennycherry’s further instructions, “ and mind you hide your hands as much as you can.”

“ What are you grinning at? ” demanded Mrs. Pennycherry, a couple of minutes later, of the dingy Mary Jane.

“ Wasn’t grinning,” explained the meek Mary Jane, “ was only smiling to myself.”

“ What at? ”

“ Dunno,” admitted Mary Jane. But still she went on smiling.

“ What’s he like then? ” demanded Mrs. Pennycherry.

“ ’E ain’t the usual sort,” was Mary Jane’s opinion.

“ Thank God for that,” ejaculated Mrs. Pennycherry piously.

“ Says ’e’s been recommended, by a friend.”

“ By whom? ”

“ By a friend. ’E didn’t say no name.”

Mrs. Pennycherry pondered. “ He’s not the funny sort, is he? ”

Not that sort at all. Mary Jane was sure of it.

Mrs. Pennycherry ascended the stairs still pondering. As she entered the room the stranger rose and bowed. Nothing could have been simpler than the stranger’s bow, yet there came with it to Mrs. Pennycherry a rush of old sensations long forgotten. For one brief moment Mrs. Pennycherry saw herself an amiable well-bred lady, widow of a solicitor: a visitor had called to see her. It was but a momentary fancy. The next instant Reality reasserted itself. Mrs. Pennycherry, a lodging-house keeper, existing precariously upon a daily round of petty meannesses, was prepared for contest with a possible new boarder, who fortunately looked an inexperienced young gentleman.

“ Someone has recommended me to you,” began Mrs. Pennycherry; “ may I ask who? ”

But the stranger waved the question aside as immaterial.

“ You might not remember—him,” he smiled. “ He thought that I should do well to pass the few months I am given—that I have to be in London, here. You can take me in? ”

Mrs. Pennycherry thought that she would be able to take the stranger in.

“ A room to sleep in,” explained the stranger, “—any room will do—with food and drink sufficient for a man, is all that I require.”

“ For breakfast,” began Mrs. Pennycherry, “ I always give——”

“ What is right and proper, I am convinced,” interrupted the stranger. “ Pray do not trouble to go into detail, Mrs. Pennycherry. With whatever it is I shall be content.”

Mrs. Pennycherry, puzzled, shot a quick glance at the stranger, but his face, though the gentle eyes were smiling, was frank and serious.

“ At all events you will see the room,”

suggested Mrs. Pennycherry, "before we discuss terms."

"Certainly," agreed the stranger. "I am a little tired and shall be glad to rest there."

Mrs. Pennycherry led the way upward; on the landing of the third floor, paused a moment undecided, then opened the door of the back bedroom.

"It is very comfortable," commented the stranger.

"For this room," stated Mrs. Pennycherry, "together with full board, consisting of——"

"Of everything needful. It goes without saying," again interrupted the stranger with his quiet grave smile.

"I have generally asked," continued Mrs. Pennycherry, "four pounds a week. To you——" Mrs. Pennycherry's voice, unknown to her, took to itself the note of aggressive generosity—"seeing you have been recommended here, say three pounds ten."

"Dear lady," said the stranger, "that is kind of you. As you have

divined, I am not a rich man. If it be not imposing upon you I accept your reduction with gratitude."

Again Mrs. Pennycherry, familiar with the satirical method, shot a suspicious glance upon the stranger, but not a line was there, upon that smooth fair face, to which a sneer could for a moment have clung. Clearly he was as simple as he looked.

"Gas, of course, extra."

"Of course," agreed the stranger.

"Coals——"

"We shall not quarrel," for a third time the stranger interrupted. "You have been very considerate to me as it is. I feel, Mrs. Pennycherry, I can leave myself entirely in your hands."

The stranger appeared anxious to be alone. Mrs. Pennycherry, having put a match to the stranger's fire, turned to depart. And at this point it was that Mrs. Pennycherry, the holder hitherto of an unbroken record for sanity, behaved in a manner she herself, five minutes earlier in her career, would have

deemed impossible—that no living soul who had ever known her would have believed, even had Mrs. Pennycherry gone down upon her knees and sworn it to them.

“ Did I say three pound ten? ” demanded Mrs. Pennycherry of the stranger, her hand upon the door. She spoke crossly. She was feeling cross, with the stranger, with herself—particularly with herself.

“ You were kind enough to reduce it to that amount,” replied the stranger; “ but if upon reflection you find yourself unable——”

“ I was making a mistake,” said Mrs. Pennycherry, “ it should have been two pound ten.”

“ I cannot—I will not accept such sacrifice,” exclaimed the stranger; “ the three pound ten I can well afford.”

“ Two pound ten are my terms,” snapped Mrs. Pennycherry. “ If you are bent on paying more, you can go elsewhere. You’ll find plenty to oblige you.”

Her vehemence must have impressed the stranger. "We will not contend further," he smiled. "I was merely afraid that in the goodness of your heart——"

"Oh, it isn't as good as all that," growled Mrs. Pennycherry.

"I am not so sure," returned the stranger. "I am somewhat suspicious of you. But wilful woman must, I suppose, have her way."

The stranger held out his hand, and to Mrs. Pennycherry, at that moment, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to take it as if it had been the hand of an old friend and to end the interview with a pleasant laugh—though laughing was an exercise not often indulged in by Mrs. Pennycherry.

Mary Jane was standing by the window, her hands folded in front of her, when Mrs. Pennycherry re-entered the kitchen. By standing close to the window one caught a glimpse of the trees in Bloomsbury Square and through their bare branches of the sky beyond.

“ There’s nothing much to do for the next half hour, till Cook comes back. I’ll see to the door if you’d like a run out? ” suggested Mrs. Pennycherry.

“ It would be nice, ” agreed the girl so soon as she had recovered power of speech; “ it’s just the time of day I like. ”

“ Don’t be longer than the half hour, ” added Mrs. Pennycherry.

Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square, assembled after dinner in the drawing-room, discussed the stranger with that freedom and frankness characteristic of Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square, towards the absent.

“ Not what I call a smart young man, ” was the opinion of Augustus Longcord, who was something in the City.

“ Thpeaking for mythelf, ” commented his partner Isidore, “ hav’n’t any uthe for the thmart young man. Too many of him, ath it ith. ”

“ Must be pretty smart if he’s one too many for you, ” laughed his partner.

There was this to be said for the reparatee of Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square: it was simple of construction and easy of comprehension.

“ Well it made me feel good just looking at him,” declared Miss Kite, the highly coloured. “ It was his clothes, I suppose—made me think of Noah and the ark—all that sort of thing.”

“ It would be clothes that would make you think—if anything,” drawled the languid Miss Devine. She was a tall, handsome girl, engaged at the moment in futile efforts to recline with elegance and comfort combined upon a horsehair sofa. Miss Kite, by reason of having secured the only easy-chair, was unpopular that evening; so that Miss Devine’s remark received from the rest of the company more approbation than perhaps it merited.

“ Is that intended to be clever, dear, or only rude? ” Miss Kite requested to be informed.

“ Both,” claimed Miss Devine.

“ Myself, I must confess,” shouted

the tall young lady's father, commonly called the Colonel, "I found him a fool."

"I noticed you seemed to be getting on very well together," purred his wife, a plump, smiling little lady.

"Possibly we were," retorted the Colonel. "Fate has accustomed me to the society of fools."

"Isn't it a pity to start quarrelling immediately after dinner, you two," suggested their thoughtful daughter from the sofa, "you'll have nothing left to amuse you for the rest of the evening."

"He didn't strike me as a conversationalist," said the lady who was cousin to a baronet; "but he did pass the vegetables before he helped himself. A little thing like that shows breeding."

"Or that he didn't know you and thought maybe you'd leave him half a spoonful," laughed Augustus the wit.

"What I can't make out about him——" shouted the Colonel.

The stranger entered the room.

The Colonel, securing the evening paper, retired into a corner. The highly coloured Kite, reaching down from the mantelpiece a paper fan, held it coyly before her face. Miss Devine sat upright on the horse-hair sofa, and rearranged her skirts.

“ Know anything? ” demanded Augustus of the stranger, breaking the somewhat remarkable silence.

The stranger evidently did not understand. It was necessary for Augustus, the witty, to advance further into that odd silence.

“ What’s going to pull off the Lincoln handicap? Tell me, and I’ll go out straight and put my shirt upon it.”

“ I think you would act unwisely,” smiled the stranger; “ I am not an authority upon the subject.”

“ Not! Why they told me you were Captain Spy of the *Sporting Life*—in disguise.”

It would have been difficult for a joke to fall more flat. Nobody laughed, though why Mr. Augustus Longcord

could not understand, and maybe none of his audience could have told him, for at Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square Mr. Augustus Longcord passed as a humorist. The stranger himself appeared unaware that he was being made fun of.

"You have been misinformed," assured him the stranger.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Augustus Longcord.

"It is nothing," replied the stranger in his sweet low voice, and passed on.

"Well what about this theatre," demanded Mr. Longcord of his friend and partner; "do you want to go or don't you?" Mr. Longcord was feeling irritable.

"Goth the ticketh—may ath well," thought Isidore.

"Damn stupid piece, I'm told."

"Motht of them thupid, more or leth. Pity to wathte the ticketh," argued Isidore, and the pair went out.

"Are you staying long in London?" asked Miss Kite, raising her practised eyes towards the stranger.

“Not long,” answered the stranger.
“At least, I do not know. It depends.”

An unusual quiet had invaded the drawing-room of Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square, generally noisy with strident voices about this hour. The Colonel remained engrossed in his paper. Mrs. Devine sat with her plump white hands folded on her lap, whether asleep or not it was impossible to say. The lady who was cousin to a baronet had shifted her chair beneath the gasolier, her eyes bent on her everlasting crochet work. The languid Miss Devine had crossed to the piano, where she sat fingering softly the tuneless keys, her back to the cold barely-furnished room.

“Sit down,” commanded saucily Miss Kite, indicating with her fan the vacant seat beside her. “Tell me about yourself. You interest me.” Miss Kite adopted a pretty authoritative air towards all youthful-looking members of the opposite sex. It harmonised with the peach complexion and the golden hair, and fitted her about as well.

“ I am glad of that,” answered the stranger, taking the chair suggested. “ I so wish to interest you.”

“ You’re a very bold boy.” Miss Kite lowered her fan, for the purpose of glancing archly over the edge of it, and for the first time encountered the eyes of the stranger looking into hers. And then it was that Miss Kite experienced precisely the same curious sensation that an hour or so ago had troubled Mrs. Pennycherry when the stranger had first bowed to her. It seemed to Miss Kite that she was no longer the Miss Kite that, had she risen and looked into it, the fly-blown mirror over the marble mantelpiece would, she knew, have presented to her view; but quite another Miss Kite—a cheerful, bright-eyed lady verging on middle age, yet still good-looking in spite of her faded complexion and somewhat thin brown locks. Miss Kite felt a pang of jealousy shoot through her; this middle-aged Miss Kite seemed, on the whole, a more attractive lady. There was a wholesomeness, a

broadmindedness about her that instinctively drew one towards her. Not hampered, as Miss Kite herself was, by the necessity of appearing to be somewhere between eighteen and twenty-two, this other Miss Kite could talk sensibly, even brilliantly: one felt it. A thoroughly "nice" woman this other Miss Kite; the real Miss Kite, though envious, was bound to admit it. Miss Kite wished to goodness she had never seen the woman. The glimpse of her had rendered Miss Kite dissatisfied with herself.

"I am not a boy," explained the stranger; "and I had no intention of being bold."

"I know," replied Miss Kite. "It was a silly remark. Whatever induced me to make it, I can't think. Getting foolish in my old age, I suppose."

The stranger laughed. "Surely you are not old."

"I'm thirty-nine," snapped out Miss Kite. "You don't call it young?"

"I think it a beautiful age," insisted

the stranger; "young enough not to have lost the joy of youth, old enough to have learnt sympathy."

"Oh, I daresay," returned Miss Kite, "any age you'd think beautiful. I'm going to bed." Miss Kite rose. The paper fan had somehow got itself broken. She threw the fragments into the fire.

"It is early yet," pleaded the stranger, "I was looking forward to a talk with you."

"Well, you'll be able to look forward to it," retorted Miss Kite. "Good-night."

The truth was, Miss Kite was impatient to have a look at herself in the glass, in her own room with the door shut. The vision of that other Miss Kite—the clean-looking lady of the pale face and the brown hair had been so vivid, Miss Kite wondered whether temporary forgetfulness might not have fallen upon her while dressing for dinner that evening.

The stranger, left to his own devices,

strolled towards the loo table, seeking something to read.

“ You seem to have frightened away Miss Kite,” remarked the lady who was cousin to a baronet.

“ It seems so,” admitted the stranger.

“ My cousin, Sir William Bosster,” observed the crocheting lady, “ who married old Lord Egham’s niece—you never met the Eghams? ”

“ Hitherto,” replied the stranger, “ I have not had that pleasure.”

“ A charming family. Cannot understand—my cousin Sir William, I mean, cannot understand my remaining here. ‘ My dear Emily ’—he says the same thing every time he sees me: ‘ My dear Emily, how can you exist among the sort of people one meets with in a boarding-house.’ But they amuse me.”

A sense of humour, agreed the stranger, was always of advantage.

“ Our family on my mother’s side,” continued Sir William’s cousin in her placid monotone, “ was connected with the Tatton-Joneses, who when King

George the Fourth——” Sir William’s cousin, needing another reel of cotton, glanced up, and met the stranger’s gaze.

“ I’m sure I don’t know why I’m telling you all this,” said Sir William’s cousin in an irritable tone. “ It can’t possibly interest you.”

“ Everything connected with you interests me,” gravely the stranger assured her.

“ It is very kind of you to say so,” sighed Sir William’s cousin, but without conviction; “ I am afraid sometimes I bore people.”

The polite stranger refrained from contradiction.

“ You see,” continued the poor lady, “ I really am of good family.”

“ Dear lady,” said the stranger, “ your gentle face, your gentle voice, your gentle bearing, all proclaim it.”

She looked without flinching into the stranger’s eyes, and gradually a smile banished the reigning dulness of her features.

“How foolish of me.” She spoke rather to herself than to the stranger. “Why, of course, people—people whose opinion is worth troubling about—judge of you by what you are, not by what you go about saying you are.”

The stranger remained silent.

“I am the widow of a provincial doctor, with an income of just two hundred and thirty pounds per annum,” she argued. “The sensible thing for me to do is to make the best of it, and to worry myself about these high and mighty relations of mine as little as they have ever worried themselves about me.”

The stranger appeared unable to think of anything worth saying.

“I have other connections,” remembered Sir William’s cousin; “those of my poor husband, to whom instead of being the ‘poor relation’ I could be the fairy god-mama. They are my people—or would be,” added Sir William’s cousin tartly, “if I wasn’t a vulgar snob.”

She flushed the instant she had said

the words and, rising, commenced preparations for a hurried departure.

“Now it seems I am driving you away,” sighed the stranger.

“Having been called a ‘vulgar snob,’ ” retorted the lady with some heat, “I think it about time I went.”

“The words were your own,” the stranger reminded her.

“Whatever I may have thought,” remarked the indignant dame, “no lady—least of all in the presence of a total stranger—would have called herself——” The poor dame paused, bewildered. “There is something very curious the matter with me this evening, that I cannot understand,” she explained, “I seem quite unable to avoid insulting myself.”

Still surrounded by bewilderment, she wished the stranger good-night, hoping that when next they met she would be more herself. The stranger, hoping so also, opened the door and closed it again behind her.

“Tell me,” laughed Miss Devine, who

by sheer force of talent was contriving to wring harmony from the reluctant piano, "how did you manage to do it? I should like to know."

"How did I do what?" inquired the stranger.

"Contrive to get rid so quickly of those two old frumps?"

"How well you play!" observed the stranger. "I knew you had genius for music the moment I saw you."

"How could you tell?"

"It is written so clearly in your face."

The girl laughed, well pleased. "You seem to have lost no time in studying my face."

"It is a beautiful and interesting face," observed the stranger.

She swung round sharply on the stool and their eyes met.

"You can read faces?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, what else do you read in mine?"

"Frankness, courage——"

“ Ah, yes, all the virtues. Perhaps. We will take them for granted.” It was odd how serious the girl had suddenly become. “ Tell me the reverse side.”

“ I see no reverse side,” replied the stranger. “ I see but a fair girl, bursting into noble womanhood.”

“ And nothing else? You read no trace of greed, of vanity, of sordidness, of——” An angry laugh escaped her lips. “ And you are a reader of faces!”

“ A reader of faces.” The stranger smiled. “ Do you know what is written upon yours at this very moment? A love of truth that is almost fierce, scorn of lies, scorn of hypocrisy, the desire for all things pure, contempt of all things that are contemptible—especially of such things as are contemptible in woman. Tell me, do I not read aright?”

I wonder, thought the girl, is that why those two others both hurried from the room? Does everyone feel ashamed of the littleness that is in them when looked at by those clear, believing eyes of yours?

The idea occurred to her: "Papa seemed to have a good deal to say to you during dinner. Tell me, what were you talking about?"

"The military looking gentleman upon my left? We talked about your mother principally."

"I am sorry," returned the girl, wishful now she had not asked the question. "I was hoping he might have chosen another topic for the first evening!"

"He did try one or two," admitted the stranger; "but I have been about the world so little, I was glad when he talked to me about himself. I feel we shall be friends. He spoke so nicely, too, about Mrs. Devine."

"Indeed," commented the girl.

"He told me he had been married for twenty years and had never regretted it but once!"

Her black eyes flashed upon him, but meeting his, the suspicion died from them. She turned aside to hide her smile.

"So he regretted it—once."

“Only once,” explained the stranger, “a passing irritable mood. It was so frank of him to admit it. He told me—I think he has taken a liking to me. Indeed he hinted as much. He said he did not often get an opportunity of talking to a man like myself—he told me that he and your mother, when they travel together, are always mistaken for a honeymoon couple. Some of the experiences he related to me were really quite amusing.” The stranger laughed at recollection of them—“that even here, in this place, they are generally referred to as ‘Darby and Joan.’ ”

“Yes,” said the girl, “that is true. Mr. Longcord gave them that name, the second evening after our arrival. It was considered clever—but rather obvious I thought myself.”

“Nothing—so it seems to me,” said the stranger, “is more beautiful than the love that has weathered the storms of life. The sweet, tender blossom that flowers in the heart of the young—in hearts such as yours—that, too, is beau-

tiful. The love of the young for the young, that is the beginning of life. But the love of the old for the old, that is the beginning of—of things longer.”

“ You seem to find all things beautiful,” the girl grumbled.

“ But are not all things beautiful? ” demanded the stranger.

. The Colonel had finished his paper. “ You two are engaged in a very absorbing conversation,” observed the Colonel, approaching them.

“ We were discussing Darbies and Joans,” explained his daughter. “ How beautiful is the love that has weathered the storms of life! ”

“ Ah! ” smiled the Colonel, “ that is hardly fair. My friend has been repeating to cynical youth the confessions of an amorous husband’s affection for his middle-aged and somewhat——” The Colonel in playful mood laid his hand upon the stranger’s shoulder, an action that necessitated his looking straight into the stranger’s eyes. The Colonel drew himself up stiffly and turned scarlet.

Somebody was calling the Colonel a cad. Not only that, but was explaining quite clearly, so that the Colonel could see it for himself, why he was a cad.

“That you and your wife lead a cat and dog existence is a disgrace to both of you. At least you might have the decency to try and hide it from the world—not make a jest of your shame to every passing stranger. You are a cad, sir, a cad!”

Who was daring to say these things? Not the stranger, his lips had not moved. Besides, it was not his voice. Indeed it sounded much more like the voice of the Colonel himself. The Colonel looked from the stranger to his daughter, from his daughter back to the stranger. Clearly they had not heard the voice—a mere hallucination. The Colonel breathed again.

Yet the impression remaining was not to be shaken off. Undoubtedly it was bad taste to have joked to the stranger upon such a subject. No gentleman would have done so.

But then no gentleman would have permitted such a jest to be possible. No gentleman would be forever wrangling with his wife—certainly never in public. However irritating the woman, a gentleman would have exercised self-control.

Mrs. Devine had risen, was coming slowly across the room. Fear laid hold of the Colonel. She was going to address some aggravating remark to him—he could see it in her eye—which would irritate him into savage retort. Even this prize idiot of a stranger would understand why boarding-house wits had dubbed them “Darby and Joan,” would grasp the fact that the gallant Colonel had thought it amusing, in conversation with a table acquaintance, to hold his own wife up to ridicule.

“My dear,” cried the Colonel, hurrying to speak first, “does not this room strike you as cold? Let me fetch you a shawl.”

It was useless: the Colonel felt it. It had been too long the custom of both of them to preface with politeness their

deadliest insults to each other. She came on, thinking of a suitable reply: suitable from her point of view, that is. In another moment the truth would be out. A wild, fantastic possibility flashed through the Colonel's brain: If to him, why not to her?

"Letitia," cried the Colonel, and the tone of his voice surprised her into silence, "I want you to look closely at our friend. Does he not remind you of someone?"

Mrs. Devine, so urged, looked at the stranger long and hard. "Yes," she murmured, turning to her husband, "he does, who is it?"

"I cannot fix it," replied the Colonel; "I thought that maybe you would remember."

"It will come to me," mused Mrs. Devine. "It is someone—years ago, when I was a girl—in Devonshire. Thank you, if it isn't troubling you, Harry. I left it in the dining-room."

It was, as Mr. Augustus Longcord explained to his partner Isidore, the colos-

sal foolishness of the stranger that was the cause of all the trouble. "Give me a man, who can take care of himself—or thinks he can," declared Augustus Longcord, "and I am prepared to give a good account of myself. But when a helpless baby refuses even to look at what you call your figures, tells you that your mere word is sufficient for him, and hands you over his cheque-book to fill up for yourself—well, it isn't playing the game."

"Auguthuth," was the curt comment of his partner, "you're a fool."

"All right, my boy, you try," suggested Augustus.

"Jutht what I mean to do," asserted his partner.

"Well," demanded Augustus one evening later, meeting Isidore ascending the stairs after a long talk with the stranger in the dining-room with the door shut.

"Oh, don't arth me," retorted Isidore, "thilly ath, thath what he ith."

"What did he say?"

“ What did he thay! talked about the Jewth: what a grand rathe they were—how people mithjudged them: all that thort of rot.

“ Thaid thome of the motht honorable men he had ever met had been Jewth. Thought I wath one of ’em! ”

“ Well, did you get anything out of him? ”

“ Get anything out of him. Of courthe not. Couldn’t very well thell the whole rathe, ath it were, for a couple of hundred poundth, after that. Didn’t theem worth it.”

There were many things Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square came gradually to the conclusion were not worth the doing:—Snatching at the gravy; pouncing out of one’s turn upon the vegetables and helping oneself to more than one’s fair share; manœuvring for the easy-chair; sitting on the evening paper while pretending not to have seen it—all such-like tiresome bits of business. For the little one made out of it, really it was not worth the bother. Grumbling ever-

lastingly at one's food; grumbling everlastingly at most things; abusing Penny-cherry behind her back; abusing, for a change, one's fellow-boarders; squabbling with one's fellow-boarders about nothing in particular; sneering at one's fellow-boarders; talking scandal of one's fellow-boarders; making senseless jokes about one's fellow-boarders; talking big about oneself, nobody believing one—all such-like vulgarities. Other boarding-houses might indulge in them: Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square had its dignity to consider.

The truth is, Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square was coming to a very good opinion of itself: for the which not Bloomsbury Square so much as the stranger must be blamed. The stranger had arrived at Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square with the preconceived idea—where obtained from Heaven knows—that its seemingly commonplace, mean-minded, coarse-fibred occupants were in reality ladies and gentlemen of the first water; and time and observation had appar-

ently only strengthened this absurd idea. The natural result was, Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square was coming round to the stranger's opinion of itself.

Mrs. Pennycherry, the stranger would persist in regarding as a lady born and bred, compelled by circumstances over which she had no control to fill an arduous but honorable position of middle-class society—a sort of foster-mother, to whom were due the thanks and gratitude of her promiscuous family; and this view of herself Mrs. Pennycherry now clung to with obstinate conviction. There were disadvantages attaching, but these Mrs. Pennycherry appeared prepared to suffer cheerfully. A lady born and bred cannot charge other ladies and gentlemen for coals and candles they have never burnt; a foster-mother cannot palm off upon her children New Zealand mutton for Southdown. A mere lodging-house-keeper can play these tricks, and pocket the profits. But a lady feels she cannot: Mrs. Pennycherry felt she no longer could.

To the stranger Miss Kite was a witty and delightful conversationalist of most attractive personality. Miss Kite had one failing: it was lack of vanity. She was unaware of her own delicate and refined beauty. If Miss Kite could only see herself with his, the stranger's eyes, the modesty that rendered her distrustful of her natural charms would fall from her. The stranger was so sure of it Miss Kite determined to put it to the test. One evening, an hour before dinner, there entered the drawing-room, when the stranger only was there and before the gas was lighted, a pleasant, good-looking lady, somewhat pale, with neatly-arranged brown hair, who demanded of the stranger if he knew her. All her body was trembling, and her voice seemed inclined to run away from her and become a sob. But when the stranger, looking straight into her eyes, told her that from the likeness he thought she must be Miss Kite's younger sister, but much prettier, it became a laugh instead: and that evening the

golden-haired Miss Kite disappeared never to show her high-coloured face again; and what perhaps, more than all else, might have impressed some former habitu  of Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square with awe, it was that no one in the house made even a passing inquiry concerning her.

Sir William's cousin the stranger thought an acquisition to any boarding-house. A lady of high-class family! There was nothing outward or visible perhaps to tell you that she was of high-class family. She herself, naturally, would not mention the fact, yet somehow you felt it. Unconsciously she set a high-class tone, diffused an atmosphere of gentle manners. Not that the stranger had said this in so many words; Sir William's cousin gathered that he thought it, and felt herself in agreement with him.

For Mr. Longcord and his partner, as representatives of the best type of business men, the stranger had a great respect. With what unfortunate results

to themselves has been noted. The curious thing is that the Firm appeared content with the price they had paid for the stranger's good opinion—had even, it was rumoured, acquired a taste for honest men's respect—that in the long run was likely to cost them dear. But we all have our pet extravagance.

The Colonel and Mrs. Devine both suffered a good deal at first from the necessity imposed upon them of learning, somewhat late in life, new tricks. In the privacy of their own apartment they condoled with one another.

"Tomfool nonsense," grumbled the Colonel, "you and I starting billing and cooing at our age!"

"What I object to," said Mrs. Devine, "is the feeling that somehow I am being made to do it."

"The idea that a man and his wife cannot have their little joke together for fear of what some impertinent jackanapes may think of them! it's damn ridiculous," the Colonel exploded.

"Even when he isn't there," said

Mrs. Devine, "I seem to see him looking at me with those vexing eyes of his. Really the man quite haunts me."

"I have met him somewhere," mused the Colonel, "I'll swear I've met him somewhere. I wish to goodness he would go."

A hundred things a day the Colonel wanted to say to Mrs. Devine, a hundred things a day Mrs. Devine would have liked to observe to the Colonel. But by the time the opportunity occurred—when nobody else was by to hear—all interest in saying them was gone.

"Women will be women," was the sentiment with which the Colonel consoled himself. "A man must bear with them—must never forget that he is a gentleman."

"Oh, well, I suppose they're all alike," laughed Mrs. Devine to herself, having arrived at that stage of despair when one seeks refuge in cheerfulness. "What's the use of putting oneself out—it does no good, and only upsets one."

There is a certain satisfaction in feel-

ing you are bearing with heroic resignation the irritating follies of others. Colonel and Mrs. Devine came to enjoy the luxury of much self-approbation.

But the person seriously annoyed by the stranger's bigoted belief in the innate goodness of everyone he came across was the languid, handsome Miss Devine. The stranger would have it that Miss Devine was a noble-souled, high-minded young woman, something midway between a Flora Macdonald and a Joan of Arc. Miss Devine, on the contrary, knew herself to be a sleek, luxury-loving animal, quite willing to sell herself to the bidder who could offer her the finest clothes, the richest foods, the most sumptuous surroundings. Such a bidder was to hand in the person of a retired bookmaker, a somewhat greasy old gentleman, but exceedingly rich and undoubtedly fond of her.

Miss Devine, having made up her mind that the thing had got to be done, was anxious that it should be done quickly. And here it was that the

stranger's ridiculous opinion of her not only irritated but inconvenienced her. Under the very eyes of a person—however foolish—convinced that you are possessed of all the highest attributes of your sex, it is difficult to behave as though actuated by only the basest motives. A dozen times had Miss Devine determined to end the matter by formal acceptance of her elderly admirer's large and flabby hand, and a dozen times—the vision intervening of the stranger's grave, believing eyes—had Miss Devine refused decided answer. The stranger would one day depart. Indeed, he had told her himself, he was but a passing traveller. When he was gone it would be easier. So she thought at the time.

One afternoon the stranger entered the room where she was standing by the window, looking out upon the bare branches of the trees in Bloomsbury Square. She remembered afterwards, it was just such another foggy afternoon as the afternoon of the stranger's ar-

rival three months before. No one else was in the room. The stranger closed the door, and came towards her with that curious, quick-leaping step of his. His long coat was tightly buttoned, and in his hands he carried his old felt hat and the massive knotted stick that was almost a staff.

"I have come to say good-bye," explained the stranger. "I am going."

"I shall not see you again?" asked the girl.

"I cannot say," replied the stranger. "But you will think of me?"

"Yes," she answered with a smile, "I can promise that."

"And I shall always remember you," promised the stranger, "and I wish you every joy—the joy of love, the joy of a happy marriage."

The girl winced. "Love and marriage are not always the same thing," she said.

"Not always," agreed the stranger, "but in your case they will be one."

She looked at him.

“Do you think I have not noticed?” smiled the stranger, “a gallant, handsome lad, and clever. You love him and he loves you. I could not have gone away without knowing it was well with you.”

Her gaze wandered towards the fading light.

“Ah, yes, I love him,” she answered petulantly. “Your eyes can see clearly enough, when they want to. But one does not live on love, in our world. I will tell you the man I am going to marry if you care to know.” She would not meet his eyes. She kept her gaze still fixed upon the dingy trees, the mist beyond, and spoke rapidly and vehemently: “The man who can give me all my soul’s desire—money and the things that money can buy. You think me a woman, I’m only a pig. He is moist, and breathes like a porpoise; with cunning in place of a brain, and the rest of him mere stomach. But he is good enough for me.”

She hoped this would shock the

stranger and that now, perhaps, he would go. It irritated her to hear him only laugh.

“No,” he said, “you will not marry him.”

“Who will stop me?” she cried angrily.

“Your Better Self.”

His voice had a strange ring of authority, compelling her to turn and look upon his face. Yes, it was true, the fancy that from the very first had haunted her. She had met him, talked to him—in silent country roads, in crowded city streets, where was it? And always in talking with him her spirit had been lifted up: she had been—what he had always thought her.

“There are those,” continued the stranger (and for the first time she saw that he was of a noble presence, that his gentle, child-like eyes could also command), “whose Better Self lies slain by their own hand and troubles them no more. But yours, my child, you have let grow too strong; it will ever be your

master. You must obey. Flee from it and it will follow you; you cannot escape it. Insult it and it will chastise you with burning shame, with stinging self-reproach from day to day." The sternness faded from the beautiful face, the tenderness crept back. He laid his hand upon the young girl's shoulder. "You will marry your lover," he smiled. "With him you will walk the way of sunlight and of shadow."

And the girl, looking up into the strong, calm face, knew that it would be so, that the power of resisting her Better Self had passed away from her for ever.

"Now," said the stranger, "come to the door with me. Leave-takings are but wasted sadness. Let me pass out quietly. Close the door softly behind me."

She thought that perhaps he would turn his face again, but she saw no more of him than the odd roundness of his back under the tightly buttoned coat, before he faded into the gathering fog.

Then softly she closed the door.

THE PHILOSOPHER'S JOKE

MYSELF, I do not believe this story. Six persons are persuaded of its truth; and the hope of these six is to convince themselves it was an hallucination. Their difficulty is there are six of them. Each one alone perceives clearly that it never could have been. Unfortunately, they are close friends, and cannot get away from one another; and when they meet and look into each other's eyes the thing takes shape again.

The one who told it to me, and who immediately wished he had not, was Armitage. He told it to me one night when he and I were the only occupants of the Club smoking-room. His telling me—as he explained afterwards—was an impulse of the moment. Sense of the thing had been pressing upon him all that day with unusual persistence; and the idea had occurred to him, on my en-

tering the room, that the flippant scepticism with which an essentially commonplace mind like my own—he used the words in no offensive sense—would be sure to regard the affair might help to direct his own attention to its more absurd aspect. I am inclined to think it did. He thanked me for dismissing his entire narrative as the delusion of a disordered brain, and begged me not to mention the matter to another living soul. I promised; and I may as well here observe that I do not call this mentioning the matter. Armitage is not the man's real name; it does not even begin with an A. You might read this story and dine next to him the same evening: you would know nothing.

Also, of course, I did not consider myself debarred from speaking about it, discreetly, to Mrs. Armitage, a charming woman. She burst into tears at the first mention of the thing. It took me all I knew to tranquillize her. She said that when she did not think about the thing she could be happy. She and Armitage

never spoke of it to one another; and left to themselves her opinion was that eventually they might put remembrance behind them. She wished they were not quite so friendly with the Everetts. Mr. and Mrs. Everett had both dreamt precisely the same dream; that is, assuming it was a dream. Mr. Everett was not the sort of person that a clergyman ought, perhaps, to know; but as Armitage would always argue: for a teacher of Christianity to withdraw his friendship from a man because that man was somewhat of a sinner would be inconsistent. Rather should he remain his friend and seek to influence him. They dined with the Everetts regularly on Tuesdays, and sitting opposite the Everetts, it seemed impossible to accept as a fact that all four of them at the same time and in the same manner had fallen victims to the same illusion. I think I succeeded in leaving her more hopeful. She acknowledged that the story, looked at from the point of common sense, did sound ridiculous; and threatened me that if I ever

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breathed a word of it to anyone, she never would speak to me again. She is a charming woman, as I have already mentioned.

By a curious coincidence I happened at the time to be one of Everett's directors on a Company he had just promoted for taking over and developing the Red Sea Coasting trade. I lunched with him the following Sunday. He is an interesting talker, and curiosity to discover how so shrewd a man would account for his connection with so insane—so impossible a fancy, prompted me to hint my knowledge of the story. The manner both of him and of his wife changed suddenly. They wanted to know who it was had told me. I refused the information, because it was evident they would have been angry with him. Everett's theory was that one of them had dreamt it—probably Camelford—and by hypnotic suggestion had conveyed to the rest of them the impression that they had dreamt it also. He added that but for one slight incident he should

have ridiculed from the very beginning the argument that it could have been anything else than a dream. But what that incident was he would not tell me. His object, as he explained, was not to dwell upon the business, but to try and forget it. Speaking as a friend, he advised me, likewise, not to cackle about the matter any more than I could help, lest trouble should arise with regard to my director's fees. His way of putting things is occasionally blunt.

It was at the Everetts', later on, that I met Mrs. Camelford, one of the handsomest women I have ever set eyes upon. It was foolish of me, but my memory for names is weak. I forgot that Mr. and Mrs. Camelford were the other two concerned, and mentioned the story as a curious tale I had read years ago in an old Miscellany. I had reckoned on it to lead me into a discussion with her on platonic friendship. She jumped up from her chair and gave me a look. I remembered then, and could have bitten out my tongue. It took me a long while

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to make my peace, but she came round in the end, consenting to attribute my blunder to mere stupidity. She was quite convinced herself, she told me, that the thing was pure imagination. It was only when in company with the others that any doubt as to this crossed her mind. Her own idea was that, if everybody would agree never to mention the matter again, it would end in their forgetting it. She supposed it was her husband who had been my informant: he was just that sort of ass. She did not say it unkindly. She said when she was first married, ten years ago, few people had a more irritating effect upon her than had Camelford; but that since she had seen more of other men she had come to respect him. I like to hear a woman speak well of her husband. It is a departure which, in my opinion, should be more encouraged than it is. I assured her Camelford was not the culprit; and on the understanding that I might come to see her—not too often—on her Thursdays, I agreed with her that the best

thing I could do would be to dismiss the subject from my mind and occupy myself instead with questions that concerned myself.

I had never talked much with Camel-ford before that time, though I had often seen him at the Club. He is a strange man, of whom many stories are told. He writes journalism for a living, and poetry, which he publishes at his own expense, apparently for recreation. It occurred to me that his theory would at all events be interesting; but at first he would not talk at all, pretending to ignore the whole affair, as idle nonsense. I had almost despaired of drawing him out, when one evening, of his own accord, he asked me if I thought Mrs. Armitage, with whom he knew I was on terms of friendship, still attached importance to the thing. On my expressing the opinion that Mrs. Armitage was the most troubled of the group, he was irritated; and urged me to leave the rest of them alone and devote whatever sense I might possess to persuading her

in particular that the entire thing was and could be nothing but pure myth. He confessed frankly that to him it was still a mystery. He could easily regard it as chimera, but for one slight incident. He would not for a long while say what that was, but there is such a thing as perseverance, and in the end I dragged it out of him. This is what he told me.

“ We happened by chance to find ourselves alone in the conservatory, that night of the ball—we six. Most of the crowd had already left. The last ‘ extra ’ was being played: the music came to us faintly. Stooping to pick up Jessica’s fan, which she had let fall to the ground, something shining on the tessellated pavement underneath a group of palms suddenly caught my eye. We had not said a word to one another; indeed, it was the first evening we had any of us met one another—that is, unless the thing was not a dream. I picked it up. The others gathered round me, and when we looked into one another’s eyes we understood: it was a broken wine-cup, a

curious goblet of Bavarian glass. It was the goblet out of which we had all dreamt that we had drunk."

I have put the story together as it seems to me it must have happened. The incidents, at all events, are facts. Things have since occurred to those concerned affording me hope that they will never read it. I should not have troubled to tell it at all, but that it has a moral.

· · · · ·
Six persons sat round the great oak table in the wainscoted *Speise Saal* of that cosy hostelry, the Kneiper Hof at Königsberg. It was late into the night. Under ordinary circumstances they would have been in bed, but having arrived by the last train from Dantzic, and having supped on German fare, it had seemed to them discreeter to remain awhile in talk. The house was strangely silent. The rotund landlord, leaving their candles ranged upon the sideboard, had wished them "Gute Nacht" an hour before. The spirit of the ancient house enfolded them within its wings.

Here in this very chamber, if rumour is to be believed, Emmanuel Kant himself had sat discoursing many a time and oft. The walls, behind which for more than forty years the little peak-faced man had thought and worked, rose silvered by the moonlight just across the narrow way; the three high windows of the *Speise Saal* give out upon the old Cathedral tower beneath which now he rests. Philosophy, curious concerning human phenomena, eager for experience, unhampered by the limitation Convention would impose upon all speculation, was in the smoky air.

“Not into future events,” remarked the Rev. Nathaniel Armitage, “it is better they should be hidden from us. But into the future of ourselves—our temperament, our character—I think we ought to be allowed to see. At twenty we are one individual; at forty, another person entirely, with other views, with other interests, a different outlook upon life, attracted by quite other attributes, repelled by the very qualities that once

attracted us. It is extremely awkward, for all of us."

"I am glad to hear somebody else say that," observed Mrs. Everett, in her gentle, sympathetic voice. "I have thought it all myself so often. Sometimes I have blamed myself, yet how can one help it: the things that appeared of importance to us, they become indifferent; new voices call to us; the idols we once worshipped, we see their feet of clay."

"If under the head of idols you include me," laughed the jovial Mr. Everett, "don't hesitate to say so." He was a large red-faced gentleman, with small twinkling eyes, and a mouth both strong and sensuous. "I didn't make my feet myself. I never asked anybody to take me for a stained-glass saint. It is not I who have changed."

"I know, dear, it is I," his thin wife answered with a meek smile. "I was beautiful, there was no doubt about it, when you married me."

"You were, my dear," agreed her

husband. "As a girl few could hold a candle to you."

"It was the only thing about me that you valued, my beauty," continued his wife; "and it went so quickly. I feel sometimes as if I had swindled you."

"But there is a beauty of the mind, of the soul," remarked the Rev. Nathaniel Armitage, "that to some men is more attractive than mere physical perfection."

The soft eyes of the faded lady shone for a moment with the light of pleasure. "I am afraid Dick is not of that number," she sighed.

"Well, as I said just now about my feet," answered her husband genially, "I didn't make myself. I always have been a slave to beauty and always shall be. There would be no sense in pretending among chums that you haven't lost your looks, old girl." He laid his fine hand with kindly intent upon her bony shoulder. "But there is no call for you to fret yourself as if you had done it on purpose. No one but a lover imag-

ines a woman growing more beautiful as she grows older.”

“Some women would seem to,” answered his wife.

Involuntarily she glanced to where Mrs. Camelford sat with elbows resting on the table; and involuntarily also the small twinkling eyes of her husband followed in the same direction. There is a type that reaches its prime in middle age. Mrs. Camelford, *née* Jessica Dearwood, at twenty had been an uncanny-looking creature, the only thing about her appealing to general masculine taste having been her magnificent eyes, and even these had frightened more than they had allured. At forty, Mrs. Camelford might have posed for the entire Juno.

“Yes, he’s a cunning old joker is Time,” murmured Mr. Everett, almost inaudibly.

“What ought to have happened,” said Mrs. Armitage, while with deft fingers rolling herself a cigarette, “was for you and Nellie to have married.”

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Mrs. Everett's pale face flushed scarlet.

"My dear," exclaimed the shocked Nathaniel Armitage, flushing likewise.

"Oh, why may one not sometimes speak the truth?" answered his wife petulantly. "You and I are utterly unsuited to one another—everybody sees it. At nineteen it seemed to me beautiful, holy, the idea of being a clergyman's wife, fighting by his side against evil. Besides, you have changed since then. You were human, my dear Nat, in those days, and the best dancer I had ever met. It was your dancing was your chief attraction for me as likely as not, if I had only known myself. At nineteen how can one know oneself?"

"We loved each other," the Rev. Armitage reminded her.

"I know we did, passionately—then; but we don't now." She laughed a little bitterly. "Poor Nat! I am only another trial added to your long list. Your beliefs, your ideals are meaningless to me—mere narrow-minded dogmas, sti-

fling thought. Nellie was the wife Nature had intended for you, so soon as she had lost her beauty and with it all her worldly ideas. Fate was maturing her for you, if only we had known. As for me, I ought to have been the wife of an artist, of a poet." Unconsciously a glance from her ever restless eyes flashed across the table to where Horatio Camelford sat, puffing clouds of smoke into the air from a huge black meer-schaum pipe. "Bohemia is my country. Its poverty, its struggle would have been a joy to me. Breathing its free air, life would have been worth living."

Horatio Camelford leant back with eyes fixed on the oaken ceiling. "It is a mistake," said Horatio Camelford, "for the artist ever to marry."

The handsome Mrs. Camelford laughed good-naturedly. "The artist," remarked Mrs. Camelford, "from what I have seen of him would never know the inside of his shirt from the outside if his wife was not there to take

it out of the drawer and put it over his head."

"His wearing it inside out would not make much difference to the world," argued her husband. "The sacrifice of his art to the necessity of keeping his wife and family does."

"Well, you at all events do not appear to have sacrificed much, my boy," came the breezy voice of Dick Everett. "Why, all the world is ringing with your name."

"When I am forty-one, with all the best years of my life behind me," answered the Poet. "Speaking as a man, I have nothing to regret. No one could have had a better wife; my children are charming. I have lived the peaceful existence of the successful citizen. Had I been true to my trust I should have gone out into the wilderness, the only possible home of the teacher, the prophet. The artist is the bridegroom of Art. Marriage for him is an immorality. Had I my time again I should remain a bachelor."

“Time brings its revenges, you see,” laughed Mrs. Camelford. “At twenty that fellow threatened to commit suicide if I would not marry him, and cordially disliking him I consented. Now twenty years later, when I am just getting used to him, he calmly turns round and says he would have been better without me.”

“I heard something about it at the time,” said Mrs. Armitage. “You were very much in love with somebody else, were you not?”

“Is not the conversation assuming a rather dangerous direction?” laughed Mrs. Camelford.

“I was thinking the same thing,” agreed Mrs. Everett. “One would imagine some strange influence had seized upon us, forcing us to speak our thoughts aloud.”

“I am afraid I was the original culprit,” admitted the Reverend Nathaniel. “This room is becoming quite oppressive. Had we not better go to bed?”

The ancient lamp suspended from its

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smoke-grimed beam uttered a faint, gurgling sob, and spluttered out. The shadow of the old Cathedral tower crept in and stretched across the room, now illuminated only by occasional beams from the cloud-curtained moon. At the other end of the table sat a peak-faced little gentleman, clean-shaven, in full-bottomed wig.

“Forgive me,” said the little gentleman. He spoke in English, with a strong accent. “But it seems to me here is a case where two parties might be of service to one another.”

The six fellow-travellers round the table looked at one another, but none spoke. The idea that came to each of them, as they explained to one another later, was that without remembering it they had taken their candles and had gone to bed. This was surely a dream.

“It would greatly assist me,” continued the little peak-faced gentleman, “in experiments I am conducting into the phenomena of human tendencies, if

you would allow me to put your lives back twenty years."

Still no one of the six replied. It seemed to them that the little old gentleman must have been sitting there among them all the time, unnoticed by them.

"Judging from your talk this evening," continued the peak-faced little gentleman, "you should welcome my offer. You appear to me to be one and all of exceptional intelligence. You perceive the mistakes that you have made: you understand the causes. The future veiled, you could not help yourselves. What I propose to do is to put you back twenty years. You will be boys and girls again, but with this difference: that the knowledge of the future, so far as it relates to yourselves, will remain with you.

"Come," urged the old gentleman, "the thing is quite simple of accomplishment. As—as a certain philosopher has clearly proved: the universe is only the result of our own perceptions.

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By what may appear to you to be magic—by what in reality will be simply a chemical operation—I remove from your memory the events of the last twenty years, with the exception of what immediately concerns your own personalities. You will retain all knowledge of the changes, physical and mental, that will be in store for you; all else will pass from your perception.”

The little old gentleman took a small phial from his waistcoat pocket, and, filling one of the massive wine-glasses from a decanter, measured into it some half-a-dozen drops. Then he placed the glass in the centre of the table.

“ Youth is a good time to go back to,” said the peak-faced little gentleman, with a smile. “ Twenty years ago, it was the night of the Hunt Ball. You remember it? ”

It was Everett who drank first. He drank it with his little twinkling eyes fixed hungrily on the proud handsome face of Mrs. Camelford; and then handed the glass to his wife. It was she

perhaps who drank from it most eagerly. Her life with Everett, from the day when she had risen from a bed of sickness stripped of all her beauty, had been one bitter wrong. She drank with the wild hope that the thing might possibly be not a dream; and thrilled to the touch of the man she loved, as reaching across the table he took the glass from her hand. Mrs. Armitage was the fourth to drink. She took the cup from her husband, drank with a quiet smile, and passed it on to Camelford. And Camelford drank, looking at nobody, and replaced the glass upon the table.

“Come,” said the little old gentleman to Mrs. Camelford, “you are the only one left. The whole thing will be incomplete without you.”

“I have no wish to drink,” said Mrs. Camelford, and her eyes sought those of her husband, but he would not look at her.

“Come,” again urged the Figure. And then Camelford looked at her and laughed drily.

"You had better drink," he said.
"It's only a dream."

"If you wish it," she answered. And it was from his hands she took the glass.

It is from the narrative as Armitage told it to me that night in the Club smoking-room that I am taking most of my material. It seemed to him that all things began slowly to rise upward, leaving him stationary, but with a great pain as though the inside of him were being torn away—the same sensation greatly exaggerated, so he likened it, as descending in a lift. But around him all the time was silence and darkness unrelieved. After a period that might have been minutes, that night have been years, a faint light crept towards him. It grew stronger, and into the air which now fanned his cheek there stole the sound of far-off music. The light and the music both increased, and one by one his senses came back to him. He was seated on a low cushioned bench beneath a group of palms. A young girl

was sitting beside him, but her face was turned away from him.

“ I did not catch your name,” he was saying. “ Would you mind telling it to me ? ”

She turned her face towards him. It was the most spiritually beautiful face he had ever seen. “ I am in the same predicament,” she laughed. “ You had better write yours on my programme, and I will write mine on yours.”

So they wrote upon each other's programme and exchanged again. The name she had written was Alice Blatchley.

He had never seen her before, that he could remember. Yet at the back of his mind there dwelt the haunting knowledge of her. Somewhere long ago they had met, talked together. Slowly, as one recalls a dream, it came back to him. In some other life, vague, shadowy, he had married this woman. For the first few years they had loved each other; then the gulf had opened between them, widened. Stern, strong voices had called to him to lay aside his selfish dreams,

his boyish ambitions, to take upon his shoulders the yoke of a great duty. When more than ever he had demanded sympathy and help, this woman had fallen away from him. His ideals but irritated her. Only at the cost of daily bitterness had he been able to resist her endeavours to draw him from his path. A face—that of a woman with soft eyes, full of helpfulness, shone through the mist of his dream—the face of a woman who would one day come to him out of the Future with outstretched hands that he would yearn to clasp.

“ Shall we not dance? ” said the voice beside him. “ I really won’t sit out a waltz.”

They hurried into the ball-room. With his arm about her form, her wondrous eyes shyly, at rare moments, seeking his, then vanishing again behind their drooping lashes, the brain, the mind, the very soul of the young man passed out of his own keeping. She complimented him in her bewitching manner, a delightful blending of condescension and timidity.

“ You dance extremely well,” she told him. “ You may ask me for another, later on.”

The words flashed out from that dim haunting future. “ Your dancing was your chief attraction for me, as likely as not, had I but known? ”

All that evening and for many months to come the Present and the Future fought within him. And the experience of Nathaniel Armitage, divinity student, was the experience likewise of Alice Blatchley, who had fallen in love with him at first sight, having found him the divinest dancer she had ever whirled with to the sensuous music of the waltz; of Horatio Camelford, journalist and minor poet, whose journalism earned him a bare income, but at whose minor poetry critics smiled; of Jessica Dearwood, with her glorious eyes, and muddy complexion, and her wild hopeless passion for the big, handsome, ruddy-bearded Dick Everett, who, knowing it, only laughed at her in his kindly, lordly way, telling her with frank brutality

that the woman who was not beautiful had missed her vocation in life; of that scheming, conquering young gentleman himself, who at twenty-five had already made his mark in the City, shrewd, clever, cool-headed as a fox, except where a pretty face and shapely hand or ankle were concerned; of Nellie Fanshawe, then in the pride of her ravishing beauty, who loved none but herself, whose clay-made gods were jewels, and fine dresses and rich feasts, the envy of other women and the courtship of all mankind.

That evening of the ball each clung to the hope that this memory of the future was but a dream. They had been introduced to one another; had heard each other's names for the first time with a start of recognition; had avoided one another's eyes; had hastened to plunge into meaningless talk; till that moment when young Camelford, stooping to pick up Jessica's fan, had found that broken fragment of the Rhenish wine-glass. Then it was that conviction

refused to be shaken off, that knowledge of the future had to be sadly accepted.

What they had not foreseen was that knowledge of the future in no way affected their emotions of the present. Nathaniel Armitage grew day by day more hopelessly in love with bewitching Alice Blatchley. The thought of her marrying anyone else—the long-haired, priggish Camelford in particular—sent the blood boiling through his veins; added to which sweet Alice, with her arms about his neck, would confess to him that life without him would be a misery hardly to be endured, that the thought of him as the husband of another woman—of Nellie Fanshawe in particular—was madness to her. It was right perhaps, knowing what they did, that they should say good-bye to one another. She would bring sorrow into his life. Better far that he should put her away from him, that she should die of a broken heart, as she felt sure she would. How could he, a fond lover, inflict this suffering upon her? He

ought of course to marry Nellie Fanshawe, but he could not bear the girl. Would it not be the height of absurdity to marry a girl he strongly disliked because twenty years hence she might be more suitable to him than the woman he now loved and who loved him?

Nor could Nellie Fanshawe bring herself to discuss without laughter the suggestion of marrying on a hundred-and-fifty a year a curate that she positively hated. There would come a time when wealth would be indifferent to her, when her exalted spirit would ask but for the satisfaction of self-sacrifice. But that time had not arrived. The emotions it would bring with it she could not in her present state even imagine. Her whole present being craved for the things of this world, the things that were within her grasp. To ask her to forego them now because later on she would not care for them! it was like telling a school-boy to avoid the tuck-shop because, when a man, the thought of stick-jaw would be nauseous to him. If her capacity for

enjoyment was to be short-lived, all the more reason for grasping joy quickly.

Alice Blatchley, when her lover was not by, gave herself many a headache trying to think the thing out logically. Was it not foolish of her to rush into this marriage with dear Nat? At forty she would wish she had married somebody else. But most women at forty—she judged from conversation round about her—wished they had married somebody else. If every girl at twenty listened to herself at forty there would be no more marriage. At forty she would be a different person altogether. That other elderly person did not interest her. To ask a young girl to spoil her life purely in the interests of this middle-aged party—it did not seem right. Besides, whom else was she to marry? Camelford would not have her; he did not want her then; he was not going to want her at forty. For practical purposes Camelford was out of the question. She might marry somebody else altogether—and fare worse. She

might remain a spinster: she hated the mere name of spinster. The inky-fingered woman journalist that, if all went well, she might become: it was not her idea. Was she acting selfishly? Ought she, in his own interests, to refuse to marry dear Nat? Nellie—the little cat—who would suit him at forty, would not have him. If he was going to marry anyone but Nellie he might as well marry her, Alice. A bachelor clergyman! it sounded almost improper. Nor was dear Nat the type. If she threw him over it would be into the arms of some designing minx. What was she to do?

Camelford at forty, under the influence of favourable criticism, would have persuaded himself he was a heaven-sent prophet. his whole life to be beautifully spent in the saving of mankind. At twenty he felt he wanted to live. Weird-looking Jessica, with her magnificent eyes veiling mysteries, was of more importance to him than the rest of the species combined. Knowledge of the future in his case only spurred desire. The

muddy complexion would grow pink and white, the thin limbs round and shapely; the now scornful eyes would one day light with love at his coming. It was what he had once hoped: it was what he now knew. At forty the artist is stronger than the man; at twenty the man is stronger than the artist.

An uncanny creature, so most folks would have described Jessica Dearwood. Few would have imagined her developing into the good-natured, easy-going Mrs. Camelford of middle age. The animal, so strong within her at twenty, at thirty had burnt itself out. At eighteen, madly, blindly in love with red-bearded, deep-voiced Dick Everett she would, had he whistled to her, have flung herself gratefully at his feet, and this in spite of the knowledge forewarning her of the miserable life he would certainly lead her, at all events until her slowly developing beauty should give her the whip hand of him—by which time she would have come to despise him. Fortunately, as she told herself, there was no fear of

his doing so, the future notwithstanding. Nellie Fanshawe's beauty held him as with chains of steel, and Nellie had no intention of allowing her rich prize to escape her. Her own lover, it was true, irritated her more than any man she had ever met, but at least he would afford her refuge from the bread of charity. Jessica Dearwood, an orphan, had been brought up by a distant relative. She had not been the child to win affection. Of silent, brooding nature, every thoughtless incivility had been to her an insult, a wrong. Acceptance of young Camelford seemed her only escape from a life that had become to her a martyrdom. At forty-one he would wish he had remained a bachelor; but at thirty-eight that would not trouble her. She would know herself he was much better off as he was. Meanwhile, she would have come to like him, to respect him. He would be famous, she would be proud of him. Crying into her pillow—she could not help it—for love of handsome Dick, it was still a comfort to reflect that Nel-

lie Fanshawe, as it were, was watching over her, protecting her from herself.

Dick, as he muttered to himself a dozen times a day, ought to marry Jessica. At thirty-eight she would be his ideal. He looked at her as she was at eighteen, and shuddered. Nellie at thirty would be plain and uninteresting. But when did consideration of the future ever cry halt to passion: when did a lover ever pause thinking of the morrow? If her beauty was to quickly pass, was not that one reason the more urging him to possess it while it lasted?

Nellie Fanshawe at forty would be a saint. The prospect did not please her: she hated saints. She would love the tiresome, solemn Nathaniel: of what use was that to her now? He did not desire her; he was in love with Alice, and Alice was in love with him. What would be the sense—even if they all agreed—in the three of them making themselves miserable for all their youth that they might be contented in their old age? Let age fend for itself and leave youth to

its own instincts. Let elderly saints suffer—it was their *métier*—and youth drink the cup of life. It was a pity Dick was the only “catch” available, but he was young and handsome. Other girls had to put up with sixty and the gout.

Another point, a very serious point, had been overlooked. All that had arrived to them in that dim future of the past had happened to them as the results of their making the marriages they had made. To what fate other roads would lead their knowledge could not tell them. Nellie Fanshawe had become at forty a lovely character. Might not the hard life she had led with her husband—a life calling for continual sacrifice, for daily self-control—have helped towards this end? As the wife of a poor curate of high moral principles, would the same result have been secured? The fever that had robbed her of her beauty and turned her thoughts inward had been the result of sitting out on the balcony of the Paris Opera House with an Italian

Count on the occasion of a fancy dress ball. As the wife of an East End clergyman the chances are she would have escaped that fever and its purifying effects. Was there not danger in the position: a supremely beautiful young woman, worldly-minded, hungry for pleasure, condemned to a life of poverty with a man she did not care for? The influence of Alice upon Nathaniel Armitage, during those first years when his character was forming, had been all for good. Could he be sure that, married to Nellie, he might not have deteriorated?

Were Alice Blatchley to marry an artist could she be sure that at forty she would still be in sympathy with artistic ideals? Even as a child had not her desire ever been in the opposite direction to that favoured by her nurse? Did not the reading of Conservative journals invariably incline her towards Radicalism, and the steady stream of Radical talk round her husband's table invariably set her seeking arguments in

favour of the feudal system? Might it not have been her husband's growing Puritanism that had driven her to crave for Bohemianism? Suppose that towards middle age, the wife of a wild artist, she suddenly "took religion," as the saying is. Her last state would be worse than the first.

Camelford was of delicate physique. As an absent-minded bachelor with no one to give him his meals, no one to see that his things were aired, could he have lived till forty? Could he be sure that home life had not given more to his art than it had taken from it?

Jessica Dearwood, of a nervous, passionate nature, married to a bad husband, might at forty have posed for one of the Furies. Not until her life had become restful had her good looks shown themselves. Hers was the type of beauty that for its development demands tranquillity.

Dick Everett had no delusions concerning himself. That, had he married Jessica, he could for ten years have re-

mained the faithful husband of a singularly plain wife he knew to be impossible. But Jessica would have been no patient Griselda. The extreme probability was that having married her at twenty for the sake of her beauty at thirty, at twenty-nine at latest she would have divorced him.

Everett was a man of practical ideas. It was he who took the matter in hand. The refreshment contractor admitted that curious goblets of German glass occasionally crept into their stock. One of the waiters, on the understanding that in no case should he be called upon to pay for them, admitted having broken more than one wine-glass on that particular evening: thought it not unlikely he might have attempted to hide the fragments under a convenient palm. The whole thing evidently was a dream. So youth decided at the time, and the three marriages took place within three months of one another.

It was some ten years later that Armitage told me the story that night in the

Club smoking-room. Mrs. Everett had just recovered from a severe attack of rheumatic fever, contracted the spring before in Paris. Mrs. Camelford, whom previously I had not met, certainly seemed to me one of the handsomest women I have ever seen. Mrs. Armitage—I knew her when she was Alice Blatchley—I found more charming as a woman than she had been as a girl. What she could have seen in Armitage I never could understand. Camelford made his mark some ten years later: poor fellow, he did not live long to enjoy his fame. Dick Everett has still another six years to work off; but he is well behaved, and there is talk of a petition.

It is a curious story altogether, I admit. As I said at the beginning, I do not myself believe it.

THE SOUL OF NICHOLAS SNY- DERS, OR THE MISER OF ZANDAM

ONCE upon a time in Zandam, which is by the Zuider Zee, there lived a wicked man named Nicholas Snyders. He was mean and hard and cruel, and loved but one thing in the world, and that was gold. And even that not for its own sake. He loved the power gold gave him—the power to tyrannize and to oppress, the power to cause suffering at his will. They said he had no soul, but there they were wrong. All men own—or, to speak more correctly, are owned by—a soul; and the soul of Nicholas Snyders was an evil soul. He lived in the old windmill which still is standing on the quay, with only little Christina to wait upon him and keep house for him. Christina was an orphan whose parents had died in

debt. Nicholas, to Christina's everlasting gratitude, had cleared their memory—it cost but a few hundred florins—in consideration that Christina should work for him without wages. Christina formed his entire household, and only one willing visitor ever darkened his door, the widow Toelast. Dame Toelast was rich and almost as great a miser as Nicholas himself. “Why should not we two marry?” Nicholas had once croaked to the widow Toelast. “Together we should be masters of all Zandam.” Dame Toelast had answered with a cackling laugh; but Nicholas was never in haste.

One afternoon Nicholas Snyders sat alone at his desk in the centre of the great semi-circular room that took up half the ground floor of the windmill, and that served him for an office, and there came a knocking at the outer door.

“Come in!” cried Nicholas Snyders.

He spoke in a tone quite kind for Nicholas Snyders. He felt so sure it was Jan knocking at the door—Jan Van der

Voort, the young sailor, now master of his own ship, come to demand of him the hand of little Christina. In anticipation, Nicholas Snyders tasted the joy of dashing Jan's hopes to the ground; of hearing him plead, then rave; of watching the growing pallor that would overspread Jan's handsome face as Nicholas would, point by point, explain to him the consequences of defiance—how, firstly, Jan's old mother should be turned out of her home, his old father put into prison for debt; how, secondly, Jan himself should be pursued without remorse, his ship be bought over his head before he could complete the purchase. The interview would afford to Nicholas Snyders sport after his own soul. Since Jan's return the day before, he had been looking forward to it. Therefore, feeling sure it was Jan, he cried "Come in!" quite cheerily.

But it was not Jan. It was somebody Nicholas Snyders had never set eyes on before. And neither, after that one visit, did Nicholas Snyders ever set eyes

upon him again. The light was fading, and Nicholas Snyders was not the man to light candles before they were needed, so that he was never able to describe with any precision the stranger's appearance. Nicholas thought he seemed an old man, but alert in all his movements; while his eyes—the one thing about him Nicholas saw with any clearness—were curiously bright and piercing.

“Who are you?” asked Nicholas Snyders, taking no pains to disguise his disappointment.

“I am a pedlar,” answered the stranger. His voice was clear and not unmusical, with just the suspicion of roguishness behind.

“Not wanting anything,” answered Nicholas Snyders drily. “Shut the door and be careful of the step.”

But instead the stranger took a chair and drew it nearer, and, himself in shadow, looked straight into Nicholas Snyders' face and laughed.

“Are you quite sure, Nicholas Sny-

ders? Are you quite sure there is nothing you require? ”

“ Nothing,” growled Nicholas Snyders—“ except the sight of your back.”

The stranger bent forward, and with his long, lean hand touched Nicholas Snyders playfully upon the knee. “ Wouldn’t you like a soul, Nicholas Snyders? ” he asked.

“ Think of it,” continued the strange pedlar, before Nicholas could recover power of speech. “ For forty years you have drunk the joy of being mean and cruel. Are you not tired of the taste, Nicholas Snyders? Wouldn’t you like a change? Think of it, Nicholas Snyders—the joy of being loved, of hearing yourself blessed, instead of cursed! Wouldn’t it be good fun, Nicholas Snyders—just by way of a change? If you don’t like it, you can return and be yourself again.”

What Nicholas Snyders, recalling all things afterwards, could never understand was why he sat there, listening in patience to the stranger’s talk; for, at

the time, it seemed to him the jesting of a wandering fool. But something about the stranger had impressed him.

“I have it with me,” continued the odd pedlar; “and as for price——” The stranger made a gesture indicating dismissal of all sordid details. “I look for my reward in watching the result of the experiment. I am something of a philosopher. I take an interest in these matters. See.” The stranger dived between his legs and produced from his pack a silver flask of cunning workmanship and laid it on the table.

“Its flavour is not unpleasant,” explained the stranger. “A little bitter; but one does not drink it by the goblet: a wineglassful, such as one would of old Tokay, while the mind of both is fixed on the same thought: ‘May my soul pass into him, may his pass into me!’ The operation is quite simple: the secret lies within the drug.” The stranger patted the quaint flask as though it had been some little dog.

“You will say: ‘Who will exchange

souls with Nicholas Snyders? ’ ’ ’ The stranger appeared to have come prepared with an answer to all questions. “ My friend, you are rich ; you need not fear. It is the possession men value the least of all they have. Choose your soul and drive your bargain. I leave that to you with one word of counsel only : you will find the young readier than the old—the young, to whom the world promises all things for gold. Choose you a fine, fair, fresh, young soul, Nicholas Snyders ; and choose it quickly. Your hair is somewhat grey, my friend. Taste, before you die, the joy of living.”

The strange pedlar laughed and, rising, closed his pack. Nicholas Snyders neither moved nor spoke, until with the soft clanging of the massive door his senses returned to him. Then, seizing the flask the stranger had left behind him, he sprang from his chair, meaning to fling it after him into the street. But the flashing of the firelight on its burnished surface stayed his hand.

“ After all, the case is of value,”

Nicholas chuckled, and put the flask aside and, lighting the two tall candles, buried himself again in his green-bound ledger. Yet still from time to time Nicholas Snyders' eye would wander to where the silver flask remained half hidden among dusty papers. And later there came again a knocking at the door, and this time it really was young Jan who entered.

Jan held out his great hand across the littered desk.

"We parted in anger, Nicholas Snyders. It was my fault. You were in the right. I ask you to forgive me. I was poor. It was selfish of me to wish the little maid to share with me my poverty. But now I am no longer poor."

"Sit down," responded Nicholas in kindly tone. "I have heard of it. So now you are master and the owner of your ship—your very own."

"My very own after one more voyage," laughed Jan. "I have Burgo-master Allart's promise."

“A promise is not a performance,” hinted Nicholas. “Burgomaster Allart is not a rich man; a higher bid might tempt him. Another might step in between you and become the owner.”

Jan only laughed. “Why, that would be the work of an enemy, which, God be praised, I do not think that I possess.”

“Lucky lad!” commented Nicholas; “so few of us are without enemies. And your parents, Jan, will they live with you?”

“We wished it,” answered Jan, “both Christina and I. But the mother is feeble. The old mill has grown into her life.”

“I can understand,” agreed Nicholas. “The old vine torn from the old wall withers. And your father, Jan; people will gossip. The mill is paying?”

Jan shook his head. “It never will again; and the debts haunt him. But all that, as I tell him, is a thing of the past. His creditors have agreed to look to me and wait.”

“All of them?” queried Nicholas.

“All of them I could discover,” laughed Jan.

Nicholas Snyders pushed back his chair and looked at Jan with a smile upon his wrinkled face. “And so you and Christina have arranged it all?”

“With your consent, sir,” answered Jan.

“You will wait for that?” asked Nicholas.

“We should like to have it, sir.”

Jan smiled, but the tone of his voice fell agreeably on Nicholas Snyders’ ear. Nicholas Snyders loved best beating the dog that growled and showed its teeth.

“Better not wait for that,” said Nicholas Snyders. “You might have to wait long.”

Jan rose, an angry flush upon his face. “So nothing changes you, Nicholas Snyders. Have it your own way, then.”

“You will marry her in spite of me?”

“In spite of you and of your friends the fiends, and of your master the Devil!” flung out Jan. For Jan had a

soul that was generous and brave and tender and excessively short-tempered. Even the best of souls have their failings.

“I am sorry,” said old Nicholas.

“I am glad to hear it,” answered Jan.

“I am sorry for your mother,” explained Nicholas. “The poor dame, I fear, will be homeless in her old age. The mortgage shall be foreclosed, Jan, on your wedding-day. I am sorry for your father, Jan. His creditors, Jan—you have overlooked just one. I am sorry for him, Jan. Prison has always been his dread. I am sorry even for you, my young friend. You will have to begin life over again. Burgomaster Allart is in the hollow of my hand. I have but to say the word, your ship is mine. I wish you joy of your bride, my young friend. You must love her very dearly—you will be paying a high price for her.”

It was Nicholas Snyders’ grin that maddened Jan. He sought for something that, thrown straight at the wicked

mouth, should silence it, and by chance his hand lighted on the pedlar's silver flask. In the same instance Nicholas Snyders' hand had closed upon it also. The grin had died away.

"Sit down," commanded Nicholas Snyders. "Let us talk further." And there was that in his voice that compelled the younger man's obedience.

"You wonder, Jan, why I seek always anger and hatred. I wonder at times myself. Why do generous thoughts never come to me, as to other men? Listen, Jan; I am in a whimsical mood. Such things cannot be, but it is a whim of mine to think it might have been. Sell me your soul, Jan, sell me your soul, that I, too, may taste this love and gladness that I hear about. For a little while, Jan, only for a little while, and I will give you all you desire."

The old man seized his pen and wrote. "See, Jan, the ship is yours beyond mishap; the mill goes free; your father may hold up his head again. And all I ask, Jan, is that you drink to me, will-

ing the while that your soul may go from you and become the soul of old Nicholas Snyders—for a little while, Jan, only for a little while.”

With feverish hands the old man had drawn the stopper from the pedlar's flagon, had poured the wine into twin glasses. Jan's inclination was to laugh, but the old man's eagerness was almost frenzy. Surely he was mad; but that would not make less binding the paper he had signed. A true man does not jest with his soul, but the face of Christina was shining down on Jan from out the gloom.

“ You will mean it? ” whispered Nicholas Snyders.

“ May my soul pass from me and enter into Nicholas Snyders ! ” answered Jan, replacing his empty glass upon the table. And the two stood looking for a moment into one another's eyes.

And the high candles on the littered desk flickered and went out, as though a breath had blown them, first one and then the other.

“ I must be getting home,” came the voice of Jan from the darkness. “ Why did you blow out the candles? ”

“ We can light them again from the fire,” answered Nicholas. He did not add that he had meant to ask that same question of Jan. He thrust them among the glowing logs, first one and then the other; and the shadows crept back into their corners.

“ You will not stop and see Christina? ” asked Nicholas.

“ Not to-night,” answered Jan.

“ The paper that I signed,” Nicholas reminded him—“ you have it? ”

“ I had forgotten it,” Jan answered.

The old man took it from the desk and handed it to him. Jan thrust it into his pocket and went out. Nicholas bolted the door behind him and returned to his desk; sat long there, his elbow resting on the open ledger.

Nicholas pushed the ledger aside and laughed. “ What foolery! As if such things could be! The fellow must have bewitched me.”

Nicholas crossed to the fire and warmed his hands before the blaze. "Still, I am glad he is going to marry the little lass. A good lad, a good lad."

Nicholas must have fallen asleep before the fire. When he opened his eyes, it was to meet the grey dawn. He felt cold, stiff, hungry, and decidedly cross. Why had not Christina woke him up and given him his supper. Did she think he had intended to pass the night on a wooden chair? The girl was an idiot. He would go upstairs and tell her through the door just what he thought of her.

His way upstairs led through the kitchen. To his astonishment, there sat Christina, asleep before the burnt-out grate.

"Upon my word," muttered Nicholas to himself, "people in this house don't seem to know what beds are for!"

But it was not Christina, so Nicholas told himself. Christina had the look of a frightened rabbit: it had always irritated him. This girl, even in her sleep,

wore an impertinent expression—a delightfully impertinent expression. Besides, this girl was pretty—marvellously pretty. Indeed, so pretty a girl Nicholas had never seen in all his life before. Why had the girls, when Nicholas was young, been so entirely different! A sudden bitterness seized Nicholas: it was as though he had just learnt that long ago, without knowing it, he had been robbed.

The child must be cold. Nicholas fetched his fur-lined cloak and wrapped it about her.

There was something else he ought to do. The idea came to him while drawing the cloak around her shoulders, very gently, not to disturb her—something he wanted to do, if only he could think what it was. The girl's lips were parted. She appeared to be speaking to him, asking him to do this thing—or telling him not to do it. Nicholas could not be sure which. Half a dozen times he turned away, and half a dozen times stole back to where she sat sleeping with

that delightfully impertinent expression on her face, her lips parted. But what she wanted, or what it was he wanted, Nicholas could not think.

Perhaps Christina would know. Perhaps Christina would know who she was and how she got there. Nicholas climbed the stairs, swearing at them for creaking.

Christina's door was open. No one was in the room; the bed had not been slept upon. Nicholas descended the creaking stairs.

The girl was still asleep. Could it be Christina herself? Nicholas examined the delicious features one by one. Never before, so far as he could recollect, had he seen the girl; yet around her neck—Nicholas had not noticed it before—lay Christina's locket, rising and falling as she breathed. Nicholas knew it well; the one thing belonging to her mother Christina had insisted on keeping. The one thing about which she had ever defied him. She would never have parted with that locket. It must be Christina

herself. But what had happened to her?

Or to himself. Remembrance rushed in upon him. The odd pedlar! The scene with Jan! But surely all that had been a dream? Yet there upon the littered desk still stood the pedlar's silver flask, together with the twin stained glasses.

Nicholas tried to think, but his brain was in a whirl. A ray of sunshine streaming through the window fell across the dusty room. Nicholas had never seen the sun, that he could recollect. Involuntarily he stretched his hands towards it, felt a pang of grief when it vanished, leaving only the grey light. He drew the rusty bolts, flung open the great door. A strange world lay before him, a new world of lights and shadows, that wooed him with their beauty—a world of low, soft voices that called to him. There came to him again that bitter sense of having been robbed.

“I could have been so happy all these years,” murmured old Nicholas to himself. “It is just the little town I could

have loved—so quaint, so quiet, so home-like. I might have had friends, old cronies, children of my own maybe——”

A vision of the sleeping Christina flashed before his eyes. She had come to him a child, feeling only gratitude towards him. Had he had eyes with which to see her, all things might have been different.

Was it too late? He is not so old—not so very old. New life is in his veins. She still loves Jan, but that was the Jan of yesterday. In the future, Jan’s every word and deed will be prompted by the evil soul that was once the soul of Nicholas Snyders—that Nicholas Snyders remembers well. Can any woman love that, let the case be as handsome as you will?

Ought he, as an honest man, to keep the soul he had won from Jan by what might be called a trick? Yes, it had been a fair bargain, and Jan had taken his price. Besides, it was not as if Jan had fashioned his own soul; these things are chance. Why should one man be given

gold, and another be given parched peas? He has as much right to Jan's soul as Jan ever had. He is wiser, he can do more good with it. It was Jan's soul that loved Christina; let Jan's soul win her if it can. And Jan's soul, listening to the argument, could not think of a word to offer in opposition.

Christina was still asleep when Nicholas re-entered the kitchen. He lighted the fire and cooked the breakfast and then aroused her gently. There was no doubt it was Christina. The moment her eyes rested on old Nicholas, there came back to her the frightened rabbit look that had always irritated him. It irritated him now, but the irritation was against himself.

"You were sleeping so soundly when I came in last night——" Christina commenced.

"And you were afraid to wake me," Nicholas interrupted her. "You thought the old curmudgeon would be cross. Listen, Christina. You paid off yesterday the last debt your father owed. It

was to an old sailor—I had not been able to find him before. Not a cent more do you owe, and there remains to you, out of your wages, a hundred florins. It is yours whenever you like to ask me for it.”

Christina could not understand, neither then nor during the days that followed; nor did Nicholas enlighten her. For the soul of Jan had entered into a very wise old man, who knew that the best way to live down the past is to live boldly the present. All that Christina could be sure of was that the old Nicholas Snyders had mysteriously vanished, that in his place remained a new Nicholas, who looked at her with kindly eyes—frank and honest, compelling confidence. Though Nicholas never said so, it came to Christina that she herself, her sweet example, her ennobling influence it was that had wrought this wondrous change. And to Christina the explanation seemed not impossible—seemed even pleasing.

The sight of his littered desk was hate-

ful to him. Starting early in the morning, Nicholas would disappear for the entire day, returning in the evening tired but cheerful, bringing with him flowers that Christina laughed at, telling him they were weeds. But what mattered names? To Nicholas they were beautiful. In Zandam the children ran from him, the dogs barked after him. So Nicholas, escaping through byways, would wander far into the country. Children in the villages around came to know a kind old fellow who loved to linger, his hands resting on his staff, watching their play, listening to their laughter; whose ample pockets were storehouses of good things. Their elders, passing by, would whisper to one another how like he was in features to wicked old Nick, the miser of Zandam, and would wonder where he came from. Nor was it only the faces of the children that taught his lips to smile. It troubled him at first to find the world so full of marvellously pretty girls—of pretty women also, all more or less lovable. It

bewildered him. Until he found that, notwithstanding, Christina remained always in his thoughts the prettiest, the most lovable of them all. Then every pretty face rejoiced him: it reminded him of Christina.

On his return the second day, Christina had met him with sadness in her eyes. Farmer Beerstraater, an old friend of her father's, had called to see Nicholas; not finding Nicholas, had talked a little with Christina. A hard-hearted creditor was turning him out of his farm. Christina pretended not to know that the creditor was Nicholas himself, but marvelled that such wicked men could be. Nicholas said nothing, but the next day Farmer Beerstraater had called again, all smiles, blessings, and great wonder.

“ But what can have come to him? ” repeated Farmer Beerstraater over and over.

Christina had smiled and answered that perhaps the good God had touched his heart; but thought to herself that

perhaps it had been the good influence of another. The tale flew. Christina found herself besieged on every hand, and, finding her intercessions invariably successful, grew day by day more pleased with herself, and by consequence more pleased with Nicholas Snyders. For Nicholas was a cunning old gentleman. Jan's soul in him took delight in undoing the evil the soul of Nicholas had wrought. But the brain of Nicholas Snyders that remained to him whispered: "Let the little maid think it is all her doing."

The news reached the ears of Dame Toelast. The same evening saw her seated in the inglenook opposite Nicholas Snyders, who smoked and seemed bored.

"You are making a fool of yourself, Nicholas Snyders," the Dame told him. "Everybody is laughing at you."

"I had rather they laughed than cursed me!" growled Nicholas.

"Have you forgotten all that has

passed between us?" demanded the Dame.

"Wish I could," sighed Nicholas.

"At your age——" commenced the Dame.

"I am feeling younger than I ever felt in all my life," Nicholas interrupted her.

"You don't look it," commented the Dame.

"What do looks matter?" snapped Nicholas. "It is the soul of a man that is the real man."

"They count for something, as the world goes," explained the Dame. "Why, if I liked to follow your example and make a fool of myself, there are young men, fine young men, handsome young men——"

"Don't let me stand in your way," interposed Nicholas quickly. "As you say, I am old and I have a devil of a temper. There must be many better men than I am, men more worthy of you."

"I don't say there are not," returned the Dame: "but nobody more suitable. Girls for boys, and old women for old

men. I haven't lost my wits, Nicholas Snyders, if you have. When you are yourself again——”

Nicholas Snyders sprang to his feet. “I am myself,” he cried, “and intend to remain myself! Who dares say I am not myself?”

“I do,” retorted the Dame with exasperating coolness. “Nicholas Snyders is not himself when at the bidding of a pretty-faced doll he flings his money out of the window with both hands. He is a creature bewitched, and I am sorry for him. She'll fool you for the sake of her friends till you haven't a cent left, and then she'll laugh at you. When you are yourself, Nicholas Snyders, you will be crazy with yourself—remember that.” And Dame Toelast marched out and slammed the door behind her.

“Girls for boys, and old women for old men.” The phrase kept ringing in his ears. Hitherto his new-found happiness had filled his life, leaving no room for thought. But the old Dame's words had sown the seed of reflection.

Was Christina fooling him? The thought was impossible. Never once had she pleaded for herself, never once for Jan. The evil thought was the creature of Dame Toelast's evil mind. Christina loved him. Her face brightened at his coming. The fear of him had gone out of her; a pretty tyranny had replaced it. But was it the love that he sought? Jan's soul in old Nick's body was young and ardent. It desired Christina not as a daughter, but as a wife. Could it win her in spite of old Nick's body? The soul of Jan was an impatient soul. Better to know than to doubt.

"Do not light the candles; let us talk a little by the light of the fire only," said Nicholas. And Christina, smiling, drew her chair towards the blaze. But Nicholas sat in the shadow.

"You grow more beautiful every day, Christina," said Nicholas—"sweeter and more womanly. He will be a happy man who calls you wife."

The smile passed from Christina's

face. "I shall never marry," she answered.

"Never is a long word, little one."

"A true woman does not marry the man she does not love."

"But may she not marry the man she does?" smiled Nicholas.

"Sometimes she may not," Christina explained.

"And when is that?"

Christina's face was turned away. "When he has ceased to love her."

The soul in old Nick's body leapt with joy. "He is not worthy of you, Christina. His new fortune has changed him. Is it not so? He thinks only of money. It is as though the soul of a miser had entered into him. He would marry even Dame Toelast for the sake of her gold-bags and her broad lands and her many mills, if only she would have him. Can not you forget him?"

"I shall never forget him. I shall never love another man. I try to hide it; and often I am content to find there is so

much in the world that I can do. But my heart is breaking." She rose and, kneeling beside him, clasped her hands around him. "I am glad you have let me tell you," she said. "But for you I could not have borne it. You are so good to me."

For answer he stroked with his withered hand the golden hair that fell disordered about his withered knees. She raised her eyes to him; they were filled with tears, but smiling.

"I cannot understand," she said. "I think sometimes that you and he must have changed souls. He is hard and mean and cruel, as you used to be." She laughed, and the arms around him tightened for a moment. "And now you are kind and tender and great, as once he was. It is as if the good God had taken away my lover from me to give to me a father."

"Listen to me, Christina," he said. "It is the soul that is the man, not the body. Could you not love me for my new soul?"

“ But I do love you,” answered Christina, smiling through her tears.

“ Could you as a husband? ”

The firelight fell upon her face. Nicholas, holding it between his withered hands, looked into it long and hard; and reading what he read there, laid it back against his breast and soothed it with his withered hand.

“ I was jesting, little one,” he said. “ Girls for boys, and old women for old men. And so, in spite of all, you still love Jan? ”

“ I love him,” answered Christina. “ I cannot help it.”

“ And if he would, you would marry him, let his soul be what it may? ”

“ I love him,” answered Christina. “ I cannot help it.”

Old Nicholas sat alone before the dying fire. Is it the soul or the body that is the real man? The answer was not so simple as he had thought it.

“ Christina loved Jan ”—so Nicholas mumbled to the dying fire—“ when he had the soul of Jan. She loves him still,

though he has the soul of Nicholas Snyders. When I asked her if she could love me, it was terror I read in her eyes, though Jan's soul is now in me; she divined it. It must be the body that is the real Jan, the real Nicholas. If the soul of Christina entered into the body of Dame Toelast, should I turn from Christina, from her golden hair, her fathomless eyes, her asking lips, to desire the shrivelled carcass of Dame Toelast? No; I should still shudder at the thought of her. Yet when I had the soul of Nicholas Snyders, I did not loathe her, while Christina was naught to me. It must be with the soul that we love, else Jan would still love Christina and I should be Miser Nick. Yet here am I loving Christina, using Nicholas Snyders' brain and gold to thwart Nicholas Snyders' every scheme, doing everything that I know will make him mad when he comes back into his own body; while Jan cares no longer for Christina, would marry Dame Toelast for her broad lands, her many mills. Clearly it is the

soul that is the real man. Then ought I not to be glad, thinking I am going back into my own body, knowing that I shall wed Christina? But I am not glad; I am very miserable. I shall not go with Jan's soul, I feel it; my own soul will come back to me. I shall be again the hard, cruel, mean old man I was before, only now I shall be poor and helpless. The folks will laugh at me, and I shall curse them, powerless to do them evil. Even Dame Toelast will not want me when she learns all. And yet I must do this thing. So long as Jan's soul is in me, I love Christina better than myself. I must do this for her sake. I love her—I cannot help it.”

Old Nicholas rose, took from the place, where a month before he had hidden it, the silver flask of cunning workmanship.

“Just two more glassfuls left,” mused Nicholas, as he gently shook the flask against his ear. He laid it on the desk before him, then opened once again the old green ledger, for there still remained work to be done.

He woke Christina early. "Take these letters, Christina," he commanded. "When you have delivered them all, but not before, go to Jan; tell him I am waiting here to see him on a matter of business." He kissed her and seemed loth to let her go.

"I shall only be a little while," smiled Christina.

"All partings take but a little while," he answered.

Old Nicholas had foreseen the trouble he would have. Jan was content, had no desire to be again a sentimental young fool, eager to saddle himself with a penniless wife. Jan had other dreams.

"Drink, man, drink!" cried Nicholas impatiently, "before I am tempted to change my mind. Christina, provided you marry her, is the richest bride in Zandam. There is the deed; read it; and read quickly."

Then Jan consented, and the two men drank. And there passed a breath between them as before; and Jan with his hands covered his eyes a moment.

It was a pity, perhaps, that he did so, for in that moment Nicholas snatched at the deed that lay beside Jan on the desk. The next instant it was blazing in the fire.

“Not so poor as you thought!” came the croaking voice of Nicholas. “Not so poor as you thought! I can build again, I can build again!” And the creature, laughing hideously, danced with its withered arms spread out before the blaze, lest Jan should seek to rescue Christina’s burning dowry before it was destroyed.

Jan did not tell Christina. In spite of all Jan could say, she would go back. Nicholas Snyders drove her from the door with curses. She could not understand. The only thing clear was that Jan had come back to her.

“’Twas a strange madness that seized upon me,” Jan explained. “Let the good sea breezes bring us health.”

So from the deck of Jan’s ship they watched old Zandam till it vanished into air.

Christina cried a little at the thought of never seeing it again; but Jan comforted her and later new faces hid the old.

And old Nicholas married Dame Toelast, but, happily, lived to do evil only for a few years longer.

Long after, Jan told Christina the whole story, but it sounded very improbable, and Christina—though, of course, she did not say so—did not quite believe it, but thought Jan was trying to explain away that strange month of his life during which he had wooed Dame Toelast. Yet it certainly was strange that Nicholas, for the same short month, had been so different from his usual self.

“Perhaps,” thought Christina, “if I had not told him I loved Jan, he would not have gone back to his old ways. Poor old gentleman! No doubt it was despair.”

MRS. KORNER SINS HER MERCIES

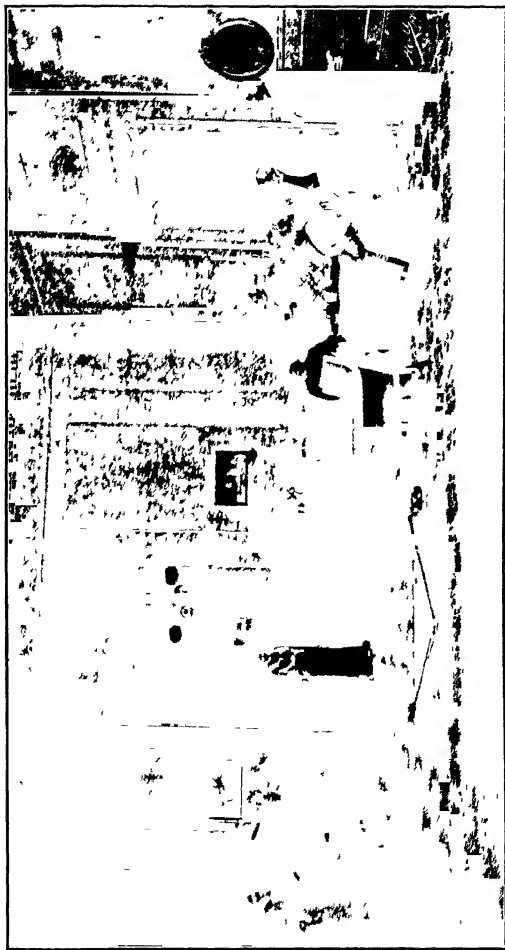
“ I do mean it,” declared Mrs. Korner,
“ I like a man to be a man.”

“ But you would not like Christopher—I mean Mr. Korner—to be that sort of man,” suggested her bosom friend.

“ I don’t mean that I should like it if he did it often. But I should like to feel that he was able to be that sort of man.—Have you told your master that breakfast is ready? ” demanded Mrs. Korner of the domestic staff, entering at the moment with three boiled eggs and a teapot.

“ Yus, I’ve told ’im,” replied the staff indignantly.

The domestic staff at Acacia Villa, Ravenscourt Park, lived in a state of indignation. It could be heard of mornings and evenings saying its prayers indignantly.



Scene from the Play "PASSING OF THE THIRD FLOOR BACK."

“ What did he say? ”

“ Said ’e’ll be down the moment ’e’s dressed.”

“ Nobody wants him to come before,” commented Mrs. Korner. “ Answered me that he was putting on his collar when I called up to him five minutes ago.”

“ Answer yer the same thing now, if yer called up to ’im agen, I ’spect,” was the opinion of the staff. “ Was on ’is ’ands and knees when I looked in, scoop- ing round under the bed for ’is collar stud.”

Mrs. Korner paused with the teapot in her hand. “ Was he talking? ”

“ Talkin’? Nobody there to talk to; I ’adn’t got no time to stop and chatter.”

“ I mean to himself,” explained Mrs. Korner. “ He—he wasn’t swearing? ” There was a note of eagerness, almost of hope, in Mrs. Korner’s voice.

“ Swearin’! ’E! Why, ’e don’t know any.”

“ Thank you,” said Mrs. Korner. “ That will do, Harriet; you may go.”

Mrs. Korner put down the teapot with a bang. "The very girl," said Mrs. Korner bitterly, "the very girl despises him."

"Perhaps," suggested Miss Greene, "he had been swearing and had finished."

But Mrs. Korner was not to be comforted. "Finished! Any other man would have been swearing all the time."

"Perhaps," suggested the kindly bosom friend, ever the one to plead the cause of the transgressor, "perhaps he was swearing, and she did not hear him. You see, if he had his head well underneath the bed——"

The door opened.

"Sorry I am late," said Mr. Korner, bursting cheerfully into the room. It was a point with Mr. Korner always to be cheerful in the morning. "Greet the day with a smile and it will leave you with a blessing," was the motto Mrs. Korner, this day a married woman of six months and three weeks' standing,

had heard her husband murmur before getting out of bed on precisely two hundred and two occasions. The Motto entered largely into the scheme of Mr. Korner's life. Written in fine copper-plate upon cards all of the same size, a choice selection counselled him each morning from the rim of his shaving-glass.

"Did you find it?" asked Mrs. Korner.

"It is most extraordinary," replied Mr. Korner, as he seated himself at the breakfast-table. "I saw it go under the bed with my own eyes. Perhaps——"

"Don't ask me to look for it," interrupted Mrs. Korner. "Crawling about on their hands and knees, knocking their heads against iron bedsteads, would be enough to make some people swear." The emphasis was on the "some."

"It is not bad training for the character," hinted Mr. Korner, "occasionally to force oneself to perform patiently tasks calculated——"

"If you get tied up in one of those

long sentences of yours, you will never get out in time to eat your breakfast," was the fear of Mrs. Korner.

"I should be sorry for anything to happen to it," remarked Mr. Korner, "its intrinsic value may perhaps——"

"I will look for it after breakfast," volunteered the amiable Miss Greene. "I am good at finding things."

"I can well believe it," the gallant Mr. Korner assured her, as with the handle of his spoon he peeled his egg. "From such bright eyes as yours, few——"

"You've only got ten minutes," his wife reminded him. "Do get on with your breakfast."

"I should like," said Mr. Korner, "to finish a speech occasionally."

"You never would," asserted Mrs. Korner.

"I should like to try," sighed Mr. Korner, "one of these days——"

"How did you sleep, dear? I forgot to ask you," questioned Mrs. Korner of the bosom friend.

“I am always restless in a strange bed the first night,” explained Miss Greene. “I daresay, too, I was a little excited.”

“I could have wished,” said Mr. Korner, “it had been a better example of the delightful art of the dramatist. When one goes but seldom to the theatre——”

“One wants to enjoy oneself,” interrupted Mrs. Korner.

“I really do not think,” said the bosom friend, “that I have ever laughed so much in all my life.”

“It was amusing. I laughed myself,” admitted Mr. Korner. “At the same time I cannot help thinking that to treat drunkenness as a theme——”

“He wasn’t drunk,” argued Mrs. Korner, “he was just jovial.”

“My dear!” Mr. Korner corrected her, “he simply couldn’t stand.”

“He was much more amusing than some people who can,” retorted Mrs. Korner.

“It is possible, my dear Aimée,” her

husband pointed out to her, "for a man to be amusing without being drunk; also for a man to be drunk without——"

"Oh, a man is all the better," declared Mrs. Korner, "for letting himself go occasionally."

"My dear——"

"You, Christopher, would be all the better for letting yourself go—occasionally."

"I wish," said Mr. Korner, as he passed his empty cup, "you would not say things you do not mean. Anyone hearing you——"

"If there's one thing makes me more angry than another," said Mrs. Korner, "it is being told I say things that I do not mean."

"Why say them then?" suggested Mr. Korner.

"I don't. I do—I mean I do mean them," explained Mrs. Korner.

"You can hardly mean, my dear," persisted her husband, "that you really think I should be all the better for getting drunk—even occasionally."

“ I didn’t say drunk; I said ‘ going it.’ ”

“ But I do ‘ go it ’ in moderation,” pleaded Mr. Korner, “ ‘ Moderation in all things,’ that is my motto.”

“ I know it,” returned Mrs. Korner.

“ A little of everything and nothing——” this time Mr. Korner interrupted himself. “ I fear,” said Mr. Korner, rising, “ we must postpone the further discussion of this interesting topic. If you would not mind stepping out with me into the passage, dear, there are one or two little matters connected with the house——”

Host and hostess squeezed past the visitor and closed the door behind them. The visitor continued eating.

“ I do mean it,” repeated Mrs. Korner, for the third time, reseating herself a minute later at the table. “ I would give anything—anything,” reiterated the lady recklessly, “ to see Christopher more like the ordinary sort of man.”

“ But he has always been the sort—

the sort of man he is," her bosom friend reminded her.

"Oh, during the engagement, of course, one expects a man to be perfect. I didn't think he was going to keep it up."

"He seems to me," said Miss Greene, "a dear, good fellow. You are one of those people who never know when they are well off."

"I know he is a good fellow," agreed Mrs. Korner, "and I am very fond of him. It is just because I am fond of him that I hate feeling ashamed of him. I want him to be a manly man, to do the things that other men do."

"Do all the ordinary sort of men swear and get occasionally drunk?"

"Of course they do," asserted Mrs. Korner, in a tone of authority. "One does not want a man to be a milksop."

"Have you ever seen a drunken man?" inquired the bosom friend, who was nibbling sugar.

"Heaps," replied Mrs. Korner, who was sucking marmalade off her fingers.

By which Mrs. Korner meant that some half a dozen times in her life she had visited the play, choosing by preference the lighter form of British drama. The first time she witnessed the real thing, which happened just precisely a month later, long after the conversation here recorded had been forgotten by the parties most concerned, no one could have been more utterly astonished than was Mrs. Korner.

How it came about Mr. Korner was never able to fully satisfy himself. Mr. Korner was not the type that serves the purpose of the temperance lecturer. His "first glass" he had drunk more years ago than he could recollect, and since had tasted the varied contents of many others. But never before had Mr. Korner exceeded, nor been tempted to exceed, the limits of his favourite virtue, moderation.

"We had one bottle of claret between us," Mr. Korner would often recall to his mind, "of which he drank the greater part. And then he brought out

the little green flask. He said it was made from pears—that in Peru they kept it specially for children's parties. Of course, that may have been his joke; but in any case I cannot see how just one glass—I wonder could I have taken more than one glass while he was talking." It was a point that worried Mr. Korner.

The "he" who had talked, possibly, to such bad effect was a distant cousin of Mr. Korner's, one Bill Damon, chief mate of the steamship *La Fortuna*. Until their chance meeting that afternoon in Leadenhall Street, they had not seen each other since they were boys together. The *Fortuna* was leaving St. Katherine's Docks early the next morning bound for South America, and it might be years before they met again. As Mr. Damon pointed out, Fate, by thus throwing them into each other's arms, clearly intended they should have a cosy dinner together that very evening in the captain's cabin of the *Fortuna*. Mr. Korner, returning to the office, des-

patched to Ravenscourt Park an express letter, announcing the strange news that he might not be home that evening much before ten, and at half-past six, for the first time since his marriage, directed his steps away from home and Mrs. Korner.

The two friends talked of many things. And later on they spoke of sweethearts and of wives. Mate Damon's experiences had apparently been wide and varied. They talked—or, rather, the mate talked, and Mr. Korner listened—of the olive-tinted beauties of the Spanish Main, of the dark-eyed passionate creoles, of the blond Junos of the Californian valleys. The mate had theories concerning the care and management of women: theories that, if the mate's word could be relied upon, had stood the test of studied application. A new world opened out to Mr. Korner; a world where lovely women worshipped with doglike devotion men who, though loving them in return, knew how to be their masters. Mr. Korner, warmed gradu-

ally from cold disapproval to bubbling appreciation, sat entranced. Time alone set a limit to the recital of the mate's adventures. At eleven o'clock the cook reminded them that the captain and the pilot might be aboard at any moment. Mr. Korner, surprised at the lateness of the hour, took a long and tender farewell of his cousin, and found St. Katherine's Docks one of the most bewildering places out of which he had ever tried to escape. Under a lamp-post in the Minories, it suddenly occurred to Mr. Korner that he was an unappreciated man. Mrs. Korner never said and did the sort of things by means of which the beauties of the Southern Main endeavoured feebly to express their consuming passion for gentlemen superior in no way—as far as he could see—to Mr. Korner himself. Thinking over the sort of things Mrs. Korner did say and did do, tears sprung into Mr. Korner's eyes. Noticing that a policeman was eyeing him with curiosity, he dashed them aside and hurried on. Pacing the

platform of the Mansion House Station, where it is always draughty, the thought of his wrongs returned to him with renewed force. Why was there no trace of doglike devotion about Mrs. Korner? The fault—so he bitterly told himself—the fault was his. “A woman loves her master; it is her instinct,” mused Mr. Korner to himself. “Damme,” thought Mr. Korner, “I don’t believe that half her time she knows I am her master.”

“Go away,” said Mr. Korner to a youth of pasty appearance who, with open mouth, had stopped immediately in front of him.

“I’m fond o’ listening,” explained the pasty youth.

“Who’s talking?” demanded Mr. Korner.

“You are,” replied the pasty youth.

It is a long journey from the city to Ravenscourt Park, but the task of planning out the future life of Mrs. Korner and himself kept Mr. Korner wide awake and interested. When he got out of the train the thing chiefly troubling him was

the three-quarters of a mile of muddy road stretching between him and his determination to make things clear to Mrs. Korner then and there.

The sight of Acacia Villa, suggesting that everybody was in bed and asleep, served to further irritate him. A dog-like wife would have been sitting up to see if there was anything he wanted. Mr. Korner, acting on the advice of his own brass plate, not only knocked but also rang. As the door did not immediately fly open, he continued to knock and ring. The window of the best bedroom on the first floor opened.

“Is that you?” said the voice of Mrs. Korner. There was, as it happened, a distinct suggestion of passion in Mrs. Korner’s voice, but not of the passion Mr. Korner was wishful to inspire. It made him a little more angry than he was before.

“Don’t you talk to me with your head out of the window as if this were a gallant show. You come down and open the door,” commanded Mr. Korner.

“ Haven’t you got your latchkey? ” demanded Mrs. Korner.

For answer Mr. Korner attacked the door again. The window closed. The next moment but six or seven, the door was opened with such suddenness that Mr. Korner, still gripping the knocker, was borne inward in a flying attitude. Mrs. Korner had descended the stairs ready with a few remarks. She had not anticipated that Mr. Korner, usually slow of speech, could be even readier.

“ Where’s my supper? ” indignantly demanded Mr. Korner, still supported by the knocker.

Mrs. Korner, too astonished for words, simply stared.

“ Where’s my supper? ” repeated Mr. Korner, by this time worked up into genuine astonishment that it was not ready for him. “ What’s everybody mean, going off to bed, when the masterororous hasn’t had his supper? ”

“ Is anything the matter, dear? ” was heard the voice of Miss Greene, speaking

from the neighbourhood of the first landing.

"Come in, Christopher," pleaded Mrs. Korner, "please come in, and let me shut the door."

Mrs. Korner was the type of young lady fond of domineering with a not ungraceful hauteur over those accustomed to yield readily to her; it is a type that is easily frightened.

"I wan' grilled kinneys-on-toast," explained Mr. Korner, exchanging the knocker for the hat-stand, and wishing the next moment that he had not. "Don' let's 'avarey talk about it. Unnerstan'? I dowan' any talk about it."

"What on earth am I to do?" whispered the terrified Mrs. Korner to her bosom friend, "there isn't a kidney in the house."

"I should poach him a couple of eggs," suggested the helpful bosom friend; "put plenty of Cayenne pepper on them. Very likely he won't remember."

Mr. Korner allowed himself to be persuaded into the dining-room, which was also the breakfast parlour and the library. The two ladies, joined by the hastily clad staff, whose chronic indignation seemed to have vanished in face of the first excuse for it that Acacia Villa had afforded her, made haste to light the kitchen fire.

"I should never have believed it," whispered the white-faced Mrs. Korner, "never."

"Makes yer know there's a man about the 'ouse, don't it?" chirped the delighted staff. Mrs. Korner, for answer, boxed the girl's ears; it relieved her feelings to a slight extent.

The staff retained its equanimity, but the operations of Mrs. Korner and her bosom friend were retarded rather than assisted by the voice of Mr. Korner, heard every quarter of a minute, roaring out fresh directions.

"I dare not go in alone," said Mrs. Korner, when all things were in order on the tray. So the bosom friend fol-

lowed her, and the staff brought up the rear.

“What’s this?” frowned Mr. Korner. “I told you chops.”

“I’m so sorry, dear,” faltered Mrs. Korner, “but there weren’t any in the house.”

“In a perfectly organizedouse, such as for the future I meanterave,” continued Mr. Korner, helping himself to beer, “there should always be chopanteak. Unnerstanme? chopanteak!”

“I’ll try and remember, dear,” said Mrs. Korner.

“Pearsterme,” said Mr. Korner, between mouthfuls, “you’re norrer sort of housekeeper I want.”

“I’ll try to be, dear,” pleaded Mrs. Korner.

“Where’s your books?” Mr. Korner suddenly demanded.

“My books?” repeated Mrs. Korner, in astonishment.

Mr. Korner struck the corner of the table with his fist, which made most

things in the room, including Mrs. Korner, jump.

“Don’t you defy me, my girl,” said Mr. Korner. “You know whatermean, your housekeepin’ books.”

They happened to be in the drawer of the chiffonier. Mrs. Korner produced them, and passed them to her husband with a trembling hand. Mr. Korner, opening one by hazard, bent over it with knitted brows.

“Pearsterme, my girl, you can’t add,” said Mr. Korner.

“I—I was always considered rather good at arithmetic, as a girl,” stammered Mrs. Korner.

“What you mayabeen as a girl, and what—twenner-seven and nine?” fiercely questioned Mr. Korner.

“Thirty-eight-seven,” commenced to blunder the terrified Mrs. Korner.

“Know your nine tables or don’t you?” thundered Mr. Korner.

“I used to,” sobbed Mrs. Korner.

“Say it,” commanded Mr. Korner.

“Nine times one are nine,” sobbed

the poor little woman, "nine times two——"

"Goron," said Mr. Korner sternly.

She went on steadily, in a low monotone, broken by stifled sobs. The dreary rhythm of the repetition may possibly have assisted. As she mentioned fearfully that nine times eleven were ninety-nine, Miss Greene pointed stealthily toward the table. Mrs. Korner, glancing up fearfully, saw that the eyes of her lord and master were closed; heard the rising snore that issued from his head, resting between the empty beer-jug and the cruet stand.

"He will be all right," counselled Miss Greene. "You go to bed and lock yourself in. Harriet and I will see to his breakfast in the morning. It will be just as well for you to be out of the way."

And Mrs. Korner, only too thankful for some one to tell her what to do, obeyed in all things.

Toward seven o'clock the sunlight streaming into the room caused Mr.

Korner first to blink, then yawn, then open half an eye.

“Greet the day with a smile,” murmured Mr. Korner, sleepily, “and it will——”

Mr. Korner sat up suddenly and looked about him. This was not bed. The fragments of a jug and glass lay scattered round his feet. To the tablecloth an overturned cruet-stand mingled with egg gave colour. A tingling sensation about his head called for investigation. Mr. Korner was forced to the conclusion that somebody had been trying to make a salad of him—somebody with an exceptionally heavy hand for mustard. A sound directed Mr. Korner’s attention to the door.

The face of Miss Greene, portentously grave, was peeping through the jar.

Mr. Korner rose. Miss Greene entered stealthily, and, closing the door, stood with her back against it.

“I suppose you know what—what you’ve done?” suggested Miss Greene.

She spoke in a sepulchral tone; it chilled poor Mr. Korner to the bone.

"It is beginning to come back to me, but not—not very clearly," admitted Mr. Korner.

"You came home drunk—very drunk," Miss Greene informed him, "at two o'clock in the morning. The noise you made must have awakened half the street."

A groan escaped from his parched lips.

"You insisted upon Aimée cooking you a hot supper."

"I insisted!" Mr. Korner glanced down upon the table. "And—and she did it!"

"You were very violent," explained Miss Greene; "we were terrified at you, all three of us." Regarding the pathetic object in front of her, Miss Greene found it difficult to recollect that a few hours before she really had been frightened of it. Sense of duty alone restrained her present inclination to laugh.

“While you sat there, eating your supper,” continued Miss Greene remorselessly, “you made her bring you her books.”

Mr. Korner had passed the stage when anything could astonish him.

“You lectured her about her house-keeping.” There was a twinkle in the eye of Mrs. Korner’s bosom friend. But lightning could have flashed before Mr. Korner’s eyes without his noticing it just then.

“You told her that she could not add, and you made her say her tables.”

“I made her—” Mr. Korner spoke in the emotionless tones of one merely desiring information. “I made Aimée say her tables?”

“Her nine times,” nodded Miss Greene.

Mr. Korner sat down upon his chair and stared with stony eyes into the future.

“What’s to be done?” said Mr. Korner, “she’ll never forgive me; I know her. You are not chaffing me?” he cried

with a momentary gleam of hope. "I really did it?"

"You sat in that very chair where you are sitting now and ate poached eggs, while she stood opposite to you and said her nine times table. At the end of it, seeing you had gone to sleep yourself, I persuaded her to go to bed. It was three o'clock, and we thought you would not mind." Miss Greene drew up a chair, and, with her elbows on the table, looked across at Mr. Korner. Decidedly there was a twinkle in the eyes of Mrs. Korner's bosom friend.

"You'll never do it again," suggested Miss Greene.

"Do you think it possible," cried Mr. Korner, "that she may forgive me?"

"No, I don't," replied Miss Greene. At which Mr. Korner's face fell back to zero. "I think the best way out will be for you to forgive her."

The idea did not even amuse him. Miss Greene glanced round to satisfy herself that the door was still closed, and

listened a moment to assure herself of the silence.

“Don’t you remember,” Miss Greene took the extra precaution to whisper it, “the talk we had at breakfast-time the first morning of my visit, when Aimée said you would be all the better for ‘going it’ occasionally?”

Yes, slowly it came back to Mr. Korner. But she only said “going it,” Mr. Korner recollected to his dismay.

“Well, you’ve been ‘going it,’ ” persisted Miss Greene. “Besides, she did not mean ‘going it.’ She meant the real thing, only she did not like to say the word. We talked about it after you had gone. She said she would give anything to see you more like the ordinary man. And that is her idea of the ordinary man.”

Mr. Korner’s sluggishness of comprehension irritated Miss Greene. She leaned across the table and shook him. “Don’t you understand? You have done it on purpose to teach her a lesson.

It is she who has got to ask you to forgive her."

"You think——?"

"I think, if you manage it properly, it will be the best day's work you have ever done. Get out of the house before she wakes. I shall say nothing to her. Indeed, I shall not have the time; I must catch the ten o'clock from Paddington. When you come home this evening, you talk first; that's what you've got to do." And Mr. Korner, in his excitement, kissed the bosom friend before he knew what he had done.

Mrs. Korner sat waiting for her husband that evening in the drawing-room. She was dressed as for a journey, and about the corners of her mouth were lines familiar to Christopher, the sight of which sent his heart into his boots. Fortunately, he recovered himself in time to greet her with a smile. It was not the smile he had been rehearsing half the day, but that it was a smile of any sort astonished the words away from Mrs. Korner's lips, and gave

him the inestimable advantage of first speech.

“ Well,” said Mr. Korner cheerily, “ and how did you like it? ”

For the moment Mrs. Korner feared her husband's new complaint had already reached the chronic stage, but his still smiling face reassured her—to that extent at all events.

“ When would you like me to ‘ go it ’ again? Oh, come,” continued Mr. Korner in response to his wife's bewilderment, “ you surely have not forgotten the talk we had at breakfast-time—the first morning of Mildred's visit. You hinted how much more attractive I should be for occasionally ‘ letting myself go! ’ ”

Mr. Korner, watching intently, perceived that upon Mrs. Korner recollection was slowly forcing itself.

“ I was unable to oblige you before,” explained Mr. Korner, “ having to keep my head clear for business, and not knowing what the effect upon one might be. Yesterday I did my best, and I hope

you are pleased with me. Though, if you could see your way to being content—just for the present and until I get more used to it—with a similar performance not oftener than once a fortnight, say, I should be grateful,” added Mr. Korner.

“You mean—” said Mrs. Korner, rising.

“I mean, my dear,” said Mr. Korner, “that almost from the day of our marriage you have made it clear that you regard me as a milksop. You have got your notion of men from silly books and sillier plays, and your trouble is that I am not like them. Well, I’ve shown you that, if you insist upon it, I can be like them.”

“But you weren’t,” argued Mrs. Korner, “not a bit like them.”

“I did my best,” repeated Mr. Korner; “we are not all made alike. That was *my* drunk.”

“I didn’t say ‘drunk.’”

“But you meant it,” interrupted Mr. Korner. “We were talking about

drunken men. The man in the play was drunk. You thought him amusing.”

“He was amusing,” persisted Mrs. Korner, now in tears. “I meant that sort of drunk.”

“His wife,” Mr. Korner reminded her, “didn’t find him amusing. In the third act she was threatening to return home to her mother, which, if I may judge from finding you here with all your clothes on, is also the idea that has occurred to you.”

“But you—you were so awful,” whimpered Mrs. Korner.

“What did I do?” questioned Mr. Korner.

“You came hammering at the door——”

“Yes, yes, I remember that. I wanted my supper, and you poached me a couple of eggs. What happened after that?”

The recollection of that crowning indignity lent to her voice the true note of tragedy.

“ You made me say my tables—my nine times! ”

Mr. Korner looked at Mrs. Korner, and Mrs. Korner looked at Mr. Korner, and for a while there was silence.

“ Were you—were you really a little bit on,” faltered Mrs. Korner, “ or only pretending? ”

“ Really,” confessed Mr. Korner. “ For the first time in my life. If you are content, for the last time also.”

“ I am sorry,” said Mrs. Korner, “ I have been very silly. Please forgive me.”

THE COST OF KINDNESS

“KINDNESS,” argued little Mrs. Pennycoop, “costs nothing.”

“And, speaking generally, my dear, is valued precisely at cost price,” retorted Mr. Pennycoop, who, as an auctioneer of twenty years’ experience, had enjoyed much opportunity of testing the attitude of the public towards sentiment.

“I don’t care what you say, George,” persisted his wife; “he may be a disagreeable, cantankerous old brute—I don’t say he isn’t. All the same, the man is going away, and we may never see him again.”

“If I thought there was any fear of our doing so,” observed Mr. Pennycoop, “I’d turn my back on the Church of England to-morrow and become a Methodist.”

“Don’t talk like that, George,” his

wife admonished him, reprovngly; "the Lord might be listening to you."

"If the Lord had to listen to old Cracklethorpe He'd sympathize with me," was the opinion of Mr. Pennycoop.

"The Lord sends us our trials, and they are meant for our good," explained his wife. "They are meant to teach us patience."

"You are not churchwarden," retorted her husband; "you can get away from him. You hear him when he is in the pulpit, where, to a certain extent, he is bound to keep his temper."

"You forget the rummage sale, George," Mrs. Pennycoop reminded him; "to say nothing of the church decorations."

"The rummage sale," Mr. Pennycoop pointed out to her, "occurs only once a year, and at that time your own temper, I have noticed——"

"I always try to remember I am a Christian," interrupted little Mrs. Pennycoop. "I do not pretend to be a saint, but whatever I say I am always sorry

for it afterwards—you know I am, George.”

“It’s what I am saying,” explained her husband. “A vicar who has contrived in three years to make every member of his congregation hate the very sight of a church—well, there’s something wrong about it somewhere.”

Mrs. Pennycoop, gentlest of little women, laid her plump and still pretty hands upon her husband’s shoulders. “Don’t think, dear, I haven’t sympathized with you. You have borne it nobly. I have marvelled sometimes that you have been able to control yourself as you have done, most times; the things that he has said to you.”

Mr. Pennycoop had slid unconsciously into an attitude suggestive of petrified virtue, lately discovered.

“One’s own poor self,” observed Mr. Pennycoop, in accents of proud humility—“insults that are merely personal one can put up with. Though even there,” added the senior churchwarden, with momentary descent towards the plane

of human nature, "nobody cares to have it hinted publicly across the vestry table that one has chosen to collect from the left side for the express purpose of artfully passing over one's own family."

"The children have always had their three-penny-bits ready waiting in their hands," explained Mrs. Pennycoop, indignantly.

"It's the sort of thing he says merely for the sake of making a disturbance," continued the senior churchwarden. "It's the things he does I draw the line at."

"The things he has done, you mean, dear," laughed the little woman, with the accent on the "has." "It is all over now, and we are going to be rid of him. I expect, dear, if we only knew, we should find it was his liver. You know, George, I remarked to you the first day that he came how pasty he looked and what a singularly unpleasant mouth he had. People can't help these things, you know, dear. One should look upon them

in the light of afflictions and be sorry for them."

"I could forgive him doing what he does if he didn't seem to enjoy it," said the senior churchwarden. "But, as you say, dear, he is going, and all I hope and pray is that we never see his like again."

"And you'll come with me to call upon him, George," urged kind little Mrs. Pennycoop. "After all, he has been our vicar for three years, and he must be feeling it, poor man—whatever he may pretend—going away like this, knowing that everybody is glad to see the back of him."

"Well, I sha'n't say anything I don't really feel," stipulated Mr. Pennycoop.

"That will be all right, dear," laughed his wife, "so long as you don't say what you do feel. And we'll both of us keep our temper," further suggested the little woman, "whatever happens. Remember, it will be for the last time."

Little Mrs. Pennycoop's intention was kind and Christianlike. The Rev.

Augustus Cracklethorpe would be quitting Wychwood-on-the-Heath the following Monday, never to set foot—so the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe himself and every single member of his congregation hoped sincerely—in the neighbourhood again. Hitherto no pains had been taken on either side to disguise the mutual joy with which the parting was looked forward to. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe, M.A., might possibly have been of service to his Church in, say, some East-end parish of unsavoury reputation, some mission station far advanced amid the hordes of heathendom. There his inborn instinct of antagonism to everybody and everything surrounding him, his unconquerable disregard for other people's views and feelings, his inspired conviction that everybody but himself was bound to be always wrong about everything, combined with determination to act and speak fearlessly in such belief, might have found their uses. In picturesque little Wychwood-on-the-Heath, among the Kentish hills, retreat

beloved of the retired tradesman, the spinster of moderate means, the reformed Bohemian developing latent instincts towards respectability, these qualities made only for scandal and disunion.

For the past two years the Rev. Cracklethorpe's parishioners, assisted by such other of the inhabitants of Wychwood-on-the-Heath as had happened to come into personal contact with the reverend gentleman, had sought to impress upon him, by hints and innuendoes difficult to misunderstand, their cordial and daily-increasing dislike of him, both as a parson and a man. Matters had come to a head by the determination officially announced to him that, failing other alternatives, a deputation of his leading parishioners would wait upon his bishop. This it was that had brought it home to the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe that, as the spiritual guide and comforter of Wychwood-on-the-Heath, he had proved a failure. The Rev. Augustus had sought and secured

the care of other souls. The following Sunday morning he had arranged to preach his farewell sermon, and the occasion promised to be a success from every point of view. Churchgoers who had not visited St. Jude's for months had promised themselves the luxury of feeling they were listening to the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe for the last time. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe had prepared a sermon that for plain speaking and directness was likely to leave an impression. The parishioners of St. Jude's, Wychwood-on-the-Heath, had their failings, as we all have. The Rev. Augustus flattered himself that he had not missed out a single one, and was looking forward with pleasurable anticipation to the sensation that his remarks, from his " firstly " to his " sixthly and lastly," were likely to create.

What marred the entire business was the impulsiveness of little Mrs. Pennycoop. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe, informed in his study on the Wednesday afternoon that Mr. and Mrs.

Pennycoop had called, entered the drawing-room a quarter of an hour later, cold and severe; and, without offering to shake hands, requested to be informed as shortly as possible for what purpose he had been disturbed. Mrs. Pennycoop had had her speech ready to her tongue. It was just what it should have been, and no more.

It referred casually, without insisting on the point, to the duty incumbent upon all of us to remember on occasion we were Christians; that our privilege it was to forgive and forget; that, generally speaking, there are faults on both sides; that partings should never take place in anger; in short, that little Mrs. Pennycoop and George, her husband, as he was waiting to say for himself, were sorry for everything and anything they may have said or done in the past to hurt the feelings of the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe, and would like to shake hands with him and wish him every happiness for the future. The chilling attitude of the Rev. Augustus scattered that

carefully-rehearsed speech to the winds. It left Mrs. Pennycoop nothing but to retire in choking silence, or to fling herself upon the inspiration of the moment and make up something new. She choose the latter alternative.

At first the words came halting. Her husband, man-like, had deserted her in her hour of utmost need and was fumbling with the door-knob. The steely stare with which the Rev. Cracklethorpe regarded her, instead of chilling her, acted upon her as a spur. It put her on her mettle. He should listen to her. She would make him understand her kindly feeling towards him if she had to take him by the shoulders and shake it into him. At the end of five minutes the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe, without knowing it, was looking pleased. At the end of another five Mrs. Pennycoop stopped, not for want of words, but for want of breath. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe replied in a voice that, to his own surprise, was trembling with emotion. Mrs. Pennycoop had made his

task harder for him. He had thought to leave Wychwood-on-the-Heath without a regret. The knowledge he now possessed, that at all events one member of his congregation understood him, as Mrs. Pennycoop had proved to him she understood him, sympathized with him—the knowledge that at least one heart, and that heart Mrs. Pennycoop's, had warmed to him, would transform what he had looked forward to as a blessed relief into a lasting grief.

Mr. Pennycoop, carried away by his wife's eloquence, added a few halting words of his own. It appeared from Mr. Pennycoop's remarks that he had always regarded the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe as the vicar of his dreams, but misunderstandings in some unaccountable way will arise. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe, it appeared, had always secretly respected Mr. Pennycoop. If at any time his spoken words might have conveyed the contrary impression, that must have arisen from

the poverty of our language, which does not lend itself to subtle meanings.

Then following the suggestion of tea. Miss Cracklethorpe, sister to the Rev. Augustus—a lady whose likeness to her brother in all respects was startling, the only difference between them being that while he was clean-shaven she wore a slight moustache—was called down to grace the board. The visit was ended by Mrs. Pennycoop's remembrance that it was Wilhelmina's night for a hot bath.

"I said more than I intended to," admitted Mrs. Pennycoop to George, her husband, on the way home; "but he irritated me."

Rumour of the Pennycoops' visit flew through the parish. Other ladies felt it their duty to show to Mrs. Pennycoop that she was not the only Christian in Wychwood-on-the-Heath. Mrs. Pennycoop, it was feared, might be getting a swelled head over this matter. The Rev. Augustus, with pardonable pride, repeated some of the things that Mrs. Pennycoop had said to him. Mrs. Pen-

nycoop was not to imagine herself the only person in Wychwood-on-the-Heath capable of generosity that cost nothing. Other ladies could say graceful nothings—could say them even better. Husbands dressed in their best clothes and carefully rehearsed were brought in to grace the almost endless procession of disconsolate parishioners hammering at the door of St. Jude's parsonage. Between Thursday morning and Saturday night the Rev. Augustus, much to his own astonishment, had been forced to the conclusion that five-sixths of his parishioners had loved him from the first without hitherto having had opportunity of expressing their real feelings.

The eventful Sunday arrived. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe had been kept so busy listening to regrets at his departure, assurances of an esteem hitherto disguised from him, explanations of seeming discourtesies that had been intended as tokens of affectionate regard, that no time had been left to him to think of other matters. Not till he

entered the vestry at five minutes to eleven did recollection of his farewell sermon come to him. It haunted him throughout the service. To deliver it after the revelations of the last three days would be impossible. It was the sermon that Moses might have preached to Pharaoh the Sunday prior to the exodus. To crush with it this congregation of broken-hearted adorers sorrowing for his departure would be inhuman. The Rev. Augustus tried to think of passages that might be selected, altered. There were none. From beginning to end it contained not a single sentence capable of being made to sound pleasant by any ingenuity whatsoever.

The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe climbed slowly up the pulpit steps without an idea in his head of what he was going to say. The sunlight fell upon the upturned faces of a crowd that filled every corner of the church. So happy, so buoyant a congregation the eyes of the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe had never till that day looked down upon.

The feeling came to him that he did not want to leave them. That they did not wish him to go, could he doubt? Only by regarding them as a collection of the most shameless hypocrites ever gathered together under one roof. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe dismissed the passing suspicion as a suggestion of the Evil One, folded the neatly-written manuscript that lay before him on the desk, and put it aside. He had no need of a farewell sermon. The arrangements made could easily be altered. The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe spoke from his pulpit for the first time an impromptu.

The Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe wished to acknowledge himself in the wrong. Foolishly founding his judgment upon the evidence of a few men, whose names there would be no need to mention, members of the congregation who, he hoped, would one day be sorry for the misunderstandings they had caused, brethren whom it was his duty to forgive, he had assumed the parishioners of St. Jude's, Wychwood-on-the-

Heath, to have taken a personal dislike to him. He wished to publicly apologize for the injustice he had unwittingly done to their heads and to their hearts. He now had it from their own lips that a libel had been put upon them. So far from their wishing his departure, it was self-evident that his going would inflict upon them a great sorrow. With the knowledge he now possessed of the respect—one might almost say the veneration—with which the majority of that congregation regarded him—knowledge, he admitted, acquired somewhat late—it was clear to him he could still be of help to them in their spiritual need. To leave a flock so devoted would stamp him as an unworthy shepherd. The ceaseless stream of regrets at his departure that had been poured into his ear during the last four days he had decided at the last moment to pay heed to. He would remain with them—on one condition.

There quivered across the sea of humanity below him a movement that might have suggested to a more ob-

servant watcher the convulsive clutchings of some drowning man at some chance straw. But the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe was thinking of himself.

The parish was large and he was no longer a young man. Let them provide him with a conscientious and energetic curate. He had such a one in his mind's eye, a near relation of his own, who, for a small stipend that was hardly worth mentioning, would, he knew it for a fact, accept the post. The pulpit was not the place in which to discuss these matters, but in the vestry afterwards he would be pleased to meet such members of the congregation as might choose to stay.

The question agitating the majority of the congregation during the singing of the hymn was the time it would take them to get outside the church. There still remained a faint hope that the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe, not obtaining his curate, might consider it due to his own dignity to shake from his feet the

dust of a parish generous in sentiment, but obstinately close-fisted when it came to putting its hands into its pockets.

But for the parishioners of St. Jude's that Sunday was a day of misfortune. Before there could be any thought of moving, the Rev. Augustus raised his surpliced arm and begged leave to acquaint them with the contents of a short note that had just been handed up to him. It would send them all home, he felt sure, with joy and thankfulness in their hearts. An example of Christian benevolence was among them that did honour to the Church.

Here a retired wholesale clothier from the East-end of London—a short, tubby gentleman who had recently taken the Manor House—was observed to turn scarlet.

A gentleman hitherto unknown to them had signalled his advent among them by an act of munificence that should prove a shining example to all rich men. Mr. Horatio Copper—the reverend gentleman found some diffi-

culty, apparently, in deciphering the name.

“Cooper-Smith, sir, with an hyphen,” came in a thin whisper, the voice of the still scarlet-faced clothier.

Mr. Horatio Cooper-Smith, taking—the Rev. Augustus felt confident—a not unworthy means of grappling to himself thus early the hearts of his fellow-townsmen, had expressed his desire to pay for the expense of a curate entirely out of his own pocket. Under these circumstances, there would be no further talk of a farewell between the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe and his parishioners. It would be the hope of the Rev. Augustus Cracklethorpe to live and die the pastor of St. Jude’s.

A more solemn-looking, sober congregation than the congregation that emerged that Sunday morning from St. Jude’s in Wychwood-on-the-Heath had never, perhaps, passed out of a church door.

“He’ll have more time upon his hands,” said Mr. Biles, retired wholesale

ironmonger and junior churchwarden, to Mrs. Biles, turning the corner of Acacia Avenue—"he'll have more time to make himself a curse and a stumbling-block."

"And if this 'near relation' of his is anything like him——"

"Which you may depend upon it is the case, or he'd never have thought of him," was the opinion of Mr. Biles.

"I shall give that Mrs. Pennycoop," said Mrs. Biles, "a piece of my mind when I meet her."

But of what use was that?

THE LOVE OF ULRICH NEBENDAHL

PERHAPS of all, it troubled most the Herr Pfarrer. Was he not the father of the village? And as such did it not fall to him to see his children marry well and suitably? marry in any case. It was the duty of every worthy citizen to keep alive throughout the ages the sacred hearth fire, to rear up sturdy lads and honest lassies that would serve God, and the Fatherland. A true son of Saxon soil was the Herr Pastor Winckelmann—kindly, simple, sentimental.

“Why, at your age, Ulrich—at your age,” repeated the Herr Pastor, setting down his beer and wiping with the back of his hand his large uneven lips, “I was the father of a family—two boys and a girl. You never saw her, Ulrich; so sweet, so good. We called her

Maria." The Herr Pfarrer sighed and hid his broad red face behind the raised cover of his pewter pot.

"They must be good fun in a house, the little ones," commented Ulrich, gazing upward with his dreamy eyes at the wreath of smoke ascending from his long-stemmed pipe. "The little ones, always my heart goes out to them."

"Take to yourself a wife," urged the Herr Pfarrer. "It is your duty. The good God has given to you ample means. It is not right that you should lead this lonely life. Bachelors make old maids; things of no use."

"That is so," Ulrich agreed. "I have often said the same unto myself. It would be pleasant to feel one was not working merely for oneself."

"Elsa, now," went on the Herr Pfarrer, "she is a good child, pious and economical. The price of such is above rubies."

Ulrich's face lightened with a pleasant smile. "Aye, Elsa is a good girl,"

he answered. "Her little hands—have you ever noticed them, Herr Pastor—so soft and dimpled."

The Pfarrer pushed aside his empty pot and leaned his elbows on the table.

"I think—I do not think—she would say no. Her mother, I have reason to believe—— Let me sound them—discreetly." The old pastor's red face glowed redder, yet with pleasurable anticipation; he was a born matchmaker.

But Ulrich the wheelwright shuffled in his chair uneasily.

"A little longer," he pleaded. "Let me think it over. A man should not marry without first being sure he loves. Things might happen. It would not be fair to the maiden."

The Herr Pfarrer stretched his hand across the table and laid it upon Ulrich's arm.

"It is Hedwig; twice you walked home with her last week."

"It is a lonesome way for a timid maiden; and there is the stream to cross," explained the wheelwright.

For a moment the Herr Pastor's face had clouded, but now it cleared again.

"Well, well, why not? Elsa would have been better in some respects, but Hedwig—ah, yes, she, too, is a good girl; a little wild perhaps—it will wear off. Have you spoken with her?"

"Not yet."

"But you will?"

Again there fell that troubled look into those dreamy eyes. This time it was Ulrich who, laying aside his pipe, rested his great arms upon the wooden table.

"Now, how does a man know when he is in love?" asked Ulrich of the Pastor, who, having been married twice, should surely be experienced upon the point. "How should he be sure that it is this woman and no other to whom his heart has gone out?"

A commonplace-looking man was the Herr Pastor, short and fat and bald. But there had been other days, and these had left to him a voice that still was young; and the evening twilight screening the seared face, Ulrich heard but

the pastor's voice, which was the voice of a boy.

“ She will be dearer to you than yourself. Thinking of her, all else will be as nothing. For her you would lay down your life.”

They sat in silence for a while; for the fat little Herr Pfarrer was dreaming of the past; and long, lanky Ulrich Nebendahl, the wheelwright, of the future.

That evening, as chance would have it, Ulrich returning to his homestead—a rambling mill beside the river, where he dwelt alone with ancient Anna—met Elsa of the dimpled hands upon the bridge that spans the murmuring Mühlde, and talked a while with her, and said good-night.

How sweet it had been to watch her ox-like eyes shyly seeking his, to press her dimpled hand and feel his own great strength. Surely he loved her better than he did himself. There could be no doubt of it. He pictured her in trouble, in danger from the savage soldiery that came and went like evil shadows through

these pleasant Saxon valleys, leaving death and misery behind them: burnt homesteads; wild-eyed women, hiding their faces from the light. Would he not for her sake give his life?

So it was made clear to him that little Elsa was his love.

Until next morning, when, raising his eyes from the whirling saw, there stood before him Margot, laughing. Margot, mischief-loving, wayward, that would ever be to him the baby he had played with, nursed, and comforted. Margot weary! Had he not a thousand times carried her sleeping in his arms. Margot in danger! At the mere thought his face flushed an angry scarlet.

All that afternoon Ulrich communed with himself, tried to understand himself, and could not. For Elsa and Margot and Hedwig were not the only ones by a long way. What girl in the village did he not love, if it came to that: Liesel, who worked so hard and lived so poorly, bullied by her cross-grained granddam. Susanna, plain and a little crotchety,

who had never had a sweetheart to coax the thin lips into smiles. The little ones—for so they seemed to long, lanky Ulrich, with their pleasant ways—Ulrich smiled as he thought of them—how should a man love one more than another?

The Herr Pfarrer shook his head and sighed.

“That is not love. Gott in Himmel! think what it would lead to? The good God never would have arranged things so. You love one; she is the only woman in the world for you.”

“But you, yourself, Herr Pastor, you have twice been married,” suggested the puzzled wheelwright.

“But one at a time, Ulrich—one at a time. That is a very different thing.”

Why should it not come to him, alone among men? Surely it was a beautiful thing, this love; a thing worthy of a man, without which a man was but a useless devourer of food, cumbering the earth.

So Ulrich pondered, pausing from his work one drowsy summer's afternoon,

listening to the low song of the waters. How well he knew the winding Muhlde's merry voice. He had worked beside it, played beside it all his life. Often he would sit and talk to it as to an old friend, reading answers in its changing tones.

Trudchen, seeing him idle, pushed her cold nose into his hand. Trudchen just now was feeling clever and important. Was she not the mother of the five most wonderful puppies in all Saxony? They swarmed about his legs, pressing him with their little foolish heads. Ulrich stooped and picked up one in each big hand. But this causing jealousy and heartburning, laughing, he lay down upon a log. Then the whole five stormed over him, biting his hair, trampling with their clumsy paws upon his face; till suddenly they raced off in a body to attack a floating feather. Ulrich sat up and watched them, the little rogues, the little foolish, helpless things, that called for so much care. A mother thrush twittered above his head. Ulrich rose, and,

creeping on tiptoe, peeped into the nest. But the mother bird, casting one glance towards him, went on with her work. Whoever was afraid of Ulrich the wheelwright! The tiny murmuring insects buzzed to and fro about his feet. An old man, passing to his evening rest, gave him "good-day." A zephyr whispered something to the leaves, at which they laughed, then passed upon his way. Here and there a shadow crept out from its hiding-place.

"If only I could marry the whole village!" laughed Ulrich to himself. "But that, of course, is nonsense!"

The spring that followed let loose the dogs of war again upon the blood-stained land, for now all Germany, taught late by common suffering forgetfulness of local rivalries, was rushing together in a mighty wave that would sweep French feet for ever from their hold on German soil. Ulrich, for whom the love of woman seemed not, would at least be the lover of his country. He, too, would march among those brave stern hearts

that, stealing like a thousand rivulets from every German valley, were flowing north and west to join the Prussian eagles.

But even love of country seemed denied to Ulrich of the dreamy eyes. His wheelwright's business had called him to a town far off. He had been walking all the day. Towards evening, passing the outskirts of a wood, a feeble cry for help, sounding from the shadows, fell upon his ear. Ulrich paused, and again from the sombre wood crept that weary cry of pain. Ulrich ran and came at last to where, among the wild flowers and the grass, lay prone five human figures. Two of them were of the German Landwehr, the other three Frenchmen in the hated uniform of Napoleon's famous scouts. It had been some unimportant "affair of outposts," one of those common incidents of warfare that are never recorded—never remembered save here and there by some sad face unnoticed in the crowd. Four of the men were dead; one, a Frenchman, was still alive, though

bleeding copiously from a deep wound in the chest that with a handful of dank grass he was trying to staunch.

Ulrich raised him in his arms. The man spoke no German, and Ulrich knew but his mother tongue; but when the man, turning towards the neighbouring village with a look of terror in his half-glazed eyes, pleaded with his hands, Ulrich understood, and lifting him gently carried him further into the wood.

He found a small deserted shelter that had been made by charcoal-burners, and there on a bed of grass and leaves Ulrich laid him; and there for a week all but a day Ulrich tended him and nursed him back to life, coming and going stealthily like a thief in the darkness. Then Ulrich, who had thought his one desire in life to be to kill all Frenchmen, put food and drink into the Frenchman's knapsack and guided him half through the night and took his hand; and so they parted.

Ulrich did not return to Alt Waldnitz, that lies hidden in the forest beside the

murmuring Mühlde. They would think he had gone to the war; he would let them think so. He was too great a coward to go back to them and tell them that he no longer wanted to fight; that the sound of the drum brought to him only the thought of trampled grass where dead men lay with curses in their eyes.

So, with head bowed down in shame, to and fro about the moaning land, Ulrich of the dreamy eyes came and went, guiding his solitary footsteps by the sounds of sorrow, driving away the things of evil where they crawled among the wounded, making his way swiftly to the side of pain, heedless of the uniform.

Thus one day he found himself by chance near again to forest-girdled Waldnitz. He would push his way across the hills, wander through its quiet ways in the moonlight while the good folks all lay sleeping. His footsteps quickened as he drew nearer. Where the trees broke he would be able

to look down upon it, see every roof he knew so well—the church, the mill, the winding Mühlde—the green, worn grey with dancing feet, where, when the hateful war was over, would be heard again the Saxon folk-songs.

Another was there, where the forest halts on the brow of the hill—a figure kneeling on the ground with his face towards the village. Ulrich stole closer. It was the Herr Pfarrer, praying volubly but inaudibly. He scrambled to his feet as Ulrich touched him, and his first astonishment over, poured forth his tale of woe.

There had been trouble since Ulrich's departure. A French corps of observation had been camped upon the hill, and twice within the month had a French soldier been found murdered in the woods. Heavy had been the penalties exacted from the village, and terrible had been the Colonel's threats of vengeance. Now, for a third time, a soldier stabbed in the back had been borne into camp by his raging comrades, and this

very afternoon the Colonel had sworn that if the murderer were not handed over to him within an hour from dawn, when the camp was to break up, he would before marching burn the village to the ground. The Herr Pfarrer was on his way back from the camp where he had been to plead for mercy, but it had been in vain.

“Such are foul deeds!” said Ulrich.

“The people are mad with hatred of the French,” answered the Herr Pastor. “It may be one, it may be a dozen who have taken vengeance into their own hands. May God forgive them.”

“They will not come forward—not to save the village?”

“Can you expect it of them! There is no hope for us; the village will burn as a hundred others have burned.”

Aye, that was true; Ulrich had seen their blackened ruins; the old sitting with white faces among the wreckage of their homes, the little children wailing round their knees, the tiny broods

burned in their nests. He had picked their corpses from beneath the charred trunks of the dead elms.

The Herr Pfarrer had gone forward on his melancholy mission to prepare the people for their doom.

Ulrich stood alone, looking down upon Alt Waldnitz bathed in moonlight. And there came to him the words of the old pastor: "She will be dearer to you than yourself. For her you would lay down your life." And Ulrich knew that his love was the village of Alt Waldnitz, where dwelt his people, the old and wrinkled, the laughing "little ones," where dwelt the helpless dumb things with their deep pathetic eyes, where the bees hummed drowsily, and the thousand tiny creatures of the day.

They hanged him high upon a withered elm, with his face towards Alt Waldnitz, that all the village, old and young, might see; and then to the beat of drum and scream of fife they marched away; and forest-hidden Waldnitz gathered up once more its many threads of

quiet life and wove them into homely pattern.

They talked and argued many a time, and some there were who praised and some who blamed. But the Herr Pfarrer could not understand.

Until years later a dying man unburdened his soul so that the truth became known.

Then they raised Ulrich's coffin reverently, and the young men carried it into the village and laid it in the churchyard that it might always be among them. They reared above him what in their eyes was a grand monument, and carved upon it:

"Greater love hath no man than this."

Tea Table Talk

By

Jerome K. Jerome

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CHAPTER I

“**T**HEY are very pretty, some of them,” said the Woman of the World; “not the sort of letters I should have written myself.”

“I should like to see a love-letter of yours,” interrupted the Minor Poet.

“It is very kind of you to say so,” replied the Woman of the World. “It never occurred to me that you would care for one.”

“It is what I have always maintained,” retorted the Minor Poet; “you have never really understood me.”

“I believe a volume of assorted love-letters would sell well,” said the Girton Girl; “written by the same hand, if you like, but to different correspondents at different

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periods. To the same person one is bound, more or less, to repeat one's self."

"Or from different lovers to the same correspondent," suggested the Philosopher.

"It would be interesting to observe the response of various temperaments exposed to an unvaried influence. It would throw light on the vexed question whether the qualities that adorn our beloved are her own, or ours lent to her for the occasion. Would the same woman be addressed as 'My Queen!' by one correspondent, and as 'Dear Popsy Wopsy!' by another, or would she to all her lovers be herself?"

"You might try it," I suggested to the Woman of the World, "selecting, of course, only the more interesting."

"It would cause so much unpleasantness, don't you think?" replied the Woman of the World. "Those I left out would never forgive me. It is always so with people you forget to invite to a funeral—they think it is done with deliberate intention to slight them."

"The first love-letter I ever wrote," said



"THEY WOULD HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY OF STUDYING WOMAN IN
HER NATURAL STATE."

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the Minor Poet, "was when I was sixteen. Her name was Monica; she was the left-hand girl in the third joint of the crocodile. I have never known a creature so ethereally beautiful. I wrote the letter and sealed it, but I could not make up my mind whether to slip it into her hand when we passed them, as we usually did on Thursday afternoons, or to wait for Sunday."

"There can be no question," murmured the Girton Girl abstractedly, "the best time is just as one is coming out of church. There is so much confusion; besides, one has one's Prayer-book—I beg your pardon."

"I was saved the trouble of deciding," continued the Minor Poet. "On Thursday her place was occupied by a fat, red-headed girl, who replied to my look of inquiry with an idiotic laugh, and on Sunday I searched the Hypatia House pews for her in vain. I learned subsequently that she had been sent home on the previous Wednesday, suddenly. It appeared that I was not the only one. I left the letter where I had placed it, at the bot-

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tom of my desk, and in course of time forgot it. Years later I fell in love really. I sat down to write her a love-letter that should imprison her as by some subtle spell. I would weave into it the love of all the ages. When I had finished it, I read it through and was pleased with it. Then by an accident, as I was going to seal it, I overturned my desk, and on to the floor fell that other love-letter I had written seven years before, when a boy. Out of idle curiosity I tore it open; I thought it would afford me amusement. I ended by posting it instead of the letter I had just completed. It carried precisely the same meaning; but it was better expressed, with greater sincerity, with more artistic simplicity."

"After all," said the Philosopher, "what can a man do more than tell a woman that he loves her? All the rest is mere picturesque amplification, on a par with the 'Full and descriptive report from our Special Correspondent,' elaborated out of a three-line telegram of Reuter's."

"Following that argument," said the

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Minor Poet, "you could reduce 'Romeo and Juliet' to a two-line tragedy—

"Lass and lad, loved like mad;
Silly muddle, very sad"

"To be told that you are loved," said the Girton Girl, "is only the beginning of the theorem—its proposition, so to speak."

"Or the argument of the poem," murmured the Old Maid.

"The interest," continued the Girton Girl, "lies in proving it—why does he love me?"

"I asked a man that once," said the Woman of the World. "He said it was because he couldn't help it. It seemed such a foolish answer—the sort of thing your housemaid always tells you when she breaks your favourite teapot. And yet, I suppose it was as sensible as any other."

"More so," commented the Philosopher. "It is the only possible explanation."

"I wish," said the Minor Poet, "it were a question one could ask of people without offence; I so often long to put it. Why do men

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marry viragoes, pimply girls with incipient moustaches? Why do beautiful heiresses choose thick-lipped, little men who bully them? Why are old bachelors, generally speaking, sympathetic, kind-hearted men; and old maids, so many of them, sweet-looking and amiable?"

"I think," said the Old Maid, "that perhaps—" But there she stopped.

"Pray go on," said the Philosopher. "I shall be so interested to have your views."

"It was nothing, really," said the Old Maid; "I have forgotten."

"If only one could obtain truthful answers," said the Minor Poet, "what a flood of light they might let fall on the hidden half of life!"

"It seems to me," said the Philosopher, "that, if anything, love is being exposed to too much light. The subject is becoming vulgarised. Every year a thousand problem plays and novels, poems and essays, tear the curtain from Love's Temple, drag it naked into the market-place for grinning

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crowds to gape at. In a million short stories, would-be comic, would-be serious, it is handled more or less coarsely, more or less unintelligently, gushed over, gibed and jeered at. Not a shred of self-respect is left to it. It is made the central figure of every farce, danced and sung round in every music-hall, yelled at by gallery, guffawed at by stalls. It is the stock-in-trade of every comic journal. Could any god, even a Mumbo Jumbo, so treated, hold its place among its votaries? Every term of endearment has become a catch-word, every caress mocks us from the hoardings. Every tender speech we make recalls to us, even while we are uttering it, a hundred parodies. Every possible situation has been spoiled for us in advance by the American humorist."

"I have sat out a good many parodies of 'Hamlet,' said the Minor Poet, "but the play still interests me. I remember a walking tour I once took in Bavaria. In some places the waysides are lined with crucifixes that are either comic or repulsive. There is

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a firm that turns them out by machinery. Yet, to the peasants who pass by, the Christ is still beautiful. You can belittle only what is already contemptible."

"Patriotism is a great virtue," replied the Philosopher; "the Jingoës have made it ridiculous."

"On the contrary," said the Minor Poet, "they have taught us to distinguish between the true and the false. So it is with love. The more it is cheapened, ridiculed, employed for market purposes, the less the inclination to affect it—to be in love with love, as Heine admitted he was, for its own sake."

"Is the necessity to love born in us," said the Girton Girl, "or do we practise to acquire it because it is the fashion—make up our minds to love, as boys learn to smoke, because every other fellow does it, and we do not like to be peculiar?"

"The majority of men and women," said the Minor Poet, "are incapable of love. With most it is a mere animal passion, with others a mild affection."

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"We talk about love," said the Philosopher, "as though it were a known quantity. After all, to say that a man loves is like saying that he paints or plays the violin; it conveys no meaning until we have witnessed his performance. Yet to hear the subject discussed, one might imagine the love of a Dante or a society Johnny, of a Cleopatra or a Georges Sand, to be precisely the same thing."

"It was always poor Susan's trouble," said the Woman of the World; "she could never be persuaded that Jim really loved her. It was very sad, because I am sure he was devoted to her, in his way. But he could not do the sort of things she wanted him to do; she was so romantic. He did try. He used to go to all the poetical plays and study them. But he hadn't the knack of it and he was naturally clumsy. He would rush into the room and fling himself on his knees before her, never noticing the dog, so that, instead of pouring out his heart as he had intended, he would have to start off with, 'So awfully

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sorry! Hope I haven't hurt the little beast.' Which was enough to put anybody out."

"Young girls are so foolish," said the Old Maid; "they run after what glitters, and do not see the gold until it is too late. At first they are all eyes and no heart."

"I knew a girl," I said, "or, rather, a young married woman, who was cured of folly by the homœopathic method. Her great trouble was that her husband had ceased to be her lover."

"It seems to me so sad," said the Old Maid. "Sometimes it is the woman's fault, sometimes the man's; more often both. The little courtesies, the fond words, the tender nothings that mean so much to those that love—it would cost so little not to forget them, and they would make life so much more beautiful."

"There is a line of common-sense running through all things," I replied; "the secret of life consists in not diverging far from it on either side. He had been the most devoted wooer, never happy out of her eyes; but be-

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fore they had been married a year she found to her astonishment that he could be content even away from her skirts, that he actually took pains to render himself agreeable to other women. He would spend whole afternoons at his club, slip out for a walk occasionally by himself, shut himself up now and again in his study. It went so far that one day he expressed a distinct desire to leave her for a week and go a-fishing with some other men. She never complained—at least, not to him.”

“That is where she was foolish,” said the Girton Girl. “Silence in such cases is a mistake. The other party does not know what is the matter with you, and you yourself—your temper bottled up within—become more disagreeable every day.”

“She confided her trouble to a friend,” I explained.

“I so dislike people who do that,” said the Woman of the World. “Emily never would speak to George; she would come and complain about him to me, as if I were responsible for him: I wasn’t even his mother. When

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she had finished, George would come along, and I had to listen to the whole thing over again from his point of view. I got so tired of it at last that I determined to stop it."

"How did you succeed?" asked the Old Maid, who appeared to be interested in the recipe.

"I knew George was coming one afternoon," explained the Woman of the World, "so I persuaded Emily to wait in the conservatory. She thought I was going to give him good advice; instead of that I sympathised with him and encouraged him to speak his mind freely, which he did. It made her so mad that she came out and told him what she thought of him. I left them at it. They were both of them the better for it; and so was I."

"In my case," I said, "it came about differently. Her friend explained to him just what was happening. She pointed out to him how his neglect and indifference were slowly alienating from him his wife's affections. He argued the subject.

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“‘But a lover and a husband are not the same,’ he contended; ‘the situation is entirely different. You run after somebody you want to overtake; but when you have caught him up, you settle down quietly and walk beside him; you don’t continue shouting and waving your handkerchief after you have gained him.’

“‘Their mutual friend presented the problem differently.

“‘You must hold what you have won,’ she said, ‘or it will slip away from you. By a certain course of conduct and behaviour you gained a sweet girl’s regard; show yourself other than you were, how can you expect her to think the same of you?’

“‘You mean,’ he inquired, ‘that I should talk and act as her husband exactly as I did when her lover?’

“‘Precisely,’ said the friend; ‘why not?’

“‘It seems to me a mistake,’ he grumbled.

“‘Try it and see,’ said the friend.

“‘All right,’ he said, ‘I will.’ And he went straight home and set to work.”

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"Was it too late," asked the Old Maid, "or did they come together again?"

"For the next month," I answered, "they were together twenty-four hours of the day. And then it was the wife who suggested, like the Poet in Gilbert's 'Patience,' the delight with which she would welcome an occasional afternoon off.

"He hung about her while she was dressing in the morning. Just as she had got her hair fixed he would kiss it passionately and it would come down again. All mealtime he would hold her hand under the table and insist on feeding her with a fork. Before marriage he had behaved once or twice in this sort of way at picnics; and after marriage, when at breakfast-time he had sat at the other end of the table reading the paper or his letters, she had reminded him of it reproachfully. The entire day he never left her side. She could never read a book; instead, he would read to her aloud, generally Browning's poems or translations from Goethe. Reading aloud was not an accomplishment of

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his, but in their courting days she had expressed herself pleased at his attempts, and of this he took care, in his turn, to remind her. It was his idea that if the game were played at all, she should take a hand also. If he was to blither, it was only fair that she should bleat back. As he explained; for the future they would both be lovers all their life long; and no logical argument in reply could she think of. If she tried to write a letter, he would snatch away the paper her dear hands were pressing and fall to kissing it—and, of course, smearing it. When he wasn't giving her pins and needles by sitting on her feet he was balancing himself on the arm of her chair and occasionally falling over on top of her. If she went shopping, he went with her and made himself ridiculous at the dressmaker's. In society he took no notice of anybody but of her, and was hurt if she spoke to anybody but to him. Not that it was often, during that month, that they did see any society; most invitations he refused for them both, reminding her how once upon a time she had

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regarded an evening alone with him as an entertainment superior to all others. He called her ridiculous names, talked to her in baby language; while a dozen times a day it became necessary for her to take down her back hair and do it up afresh. At the end of a month, as I have said, it was she who suggested a slight cessation of affection."

"Had I been in her place," said the Girton Girl, "it would have been a separation I should have suggested. I should have hated him for the rest of my life."

"For merely trying to agree with you?" I said.

"For showing me I was a fool for ever having wanted his affection," replied the Girton Girl.

"You can generally," said the Philosopher, "make people ridiculous by taking them at their word."

"Especially women," murmured the Minor Poet.

"I wonder," said the Philosopher, "is there really so much difference between men and

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women as we think? What there is, may it not be the result of civilisation rather than of Nature, of training rather than of instinct?"

"Deny the contest between male and female, and you deprive life of half its poetry," urged the Minor Poet.

"Poetry," returned the Philosopher, "was made for man, not man for poetry. I am inclined to think that the contest you speak of is somewhat in the nature of a 'put-up job' on the part of you poets. In the same way newspapers will always advocate war; it gives them something to write about, and is not altogether unconnected with sales. To test Nature's original intentions, it is always safe to study our cousins the animals. There we see no sign of this fundamental variation; the difference is merely one of degree."

"I quite agree with you," said the Girton Girl. "Man, acquiring cunning, saw the advantage of using his one superiority, brute strength, to make woman his slave. In all other respects she is undoubtedly his superior."

"In a woman's argument," I observed,

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"equality of the sexes invariably does mean the superiority of woman."

"That is very curious," added the Philosopher. "As you say, a woman never can be logical."

"Are all men logical?" demanded the Girton Girl.

"As a class," replied the Minor Poet, "yes."

CHAPTER II

“**W**HAT woman suffers from,” said the Philosopher, “is over-praise. It has turned her head.”

“You admit, then, that she has a head?” demanded the Girton Girl.

“It has always been a theory of mine,” returned the Philosopher, “that by Nature she was intended to possess one. It is her admirers who have always represented her as brainless.”

“Why is it that the brainy girl invariably has straight hair?” asked the Woman of the World.

“Because she doesn’t curl it,” explained the Girton Girl. She spoke somewhat snappishly, it seemed to me.

“I never thought of that,” murmured the Woman of the World.

“It is to be noted in connection with the

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argument," I ventured to remark, "that we hear but little concerning the wives of intellectual men. When we do, as in the case of the Carlyles, it is to wish we did not."

"When I was younger even than I am now," said the Minor Poet, "I thought a good deal of marriage—very young men do. My wife, I told myself, must be a woman of mind. Yet, curiously, of all the women I have ever loved, no single one has been remarkable for intellect—present company, as usual, of course excepted."

"Why is it," sighed the Philosopher, "that in the most serious business of our life, marriage, serious considerations count for next to nothing? A dimpled chin can, and often does, secure for a girl the best of husbands; while virtue and understanding combined cannot be relied upon to obtain for her even one of the worst."

"I think the explanation is," replied the Minor Poet, "that as regards, let us say, the most natural business of our life, marriage, our natural instincts alone are brought into

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play. Marriage—clothe the naked fact in what flowers of rhetoric we will—has to do with the purely animal part of our being. The man is drawn towards it by his primeval desires; the woman by her inborn craving towards motherhood.”

The thin, white hands of the Old Maid fluttered, troubled, where they lay upon her lap. “Why should we seek to explain away all the beautiful things of life?” she said. She spoke with a heat unusual to her. “The blushing lad, so timid, so devotional, worshipping as at the shrine of some mystic saint; the young girl moving spellbound among dreams! They think of nothing but one another.”

“Tracing a mountain stream to its sombre source need not mar its music for us as it murmurs through the valley,” expounded the Philosopher. “The hidden law of our being feeds each leaf of our life as sap runs through the tree. The transient blossom, the ripened fruit, is but its changing outward form.”

“I hate going to the roots of things,” said

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the Woman of the World. "Poor, dear papa was so fond of doing that. He would explain to us the genesis of oysters just when we were enjoying them. Poor mamma could never bring herself to touch them after that. While in the middle of dessert he would stop to argue with my uncle Paul whether pig's blood or bullock's was the best for grape vines. I remember the year before Emily came out her favourite pony died; I have never known her so cut up about anything before or since. She asked papa if he would mind her having the poor creature buried in the garden. Her idea was that she would visit now and then its grave and weep awhile. Papa was awfully nice about it and stroked her hair. 'Certainly, my dear,' he said, 'we will have him laid to rest in the new strawberry bed.' Just then old Pardoe, the head gardener, came up to us and touched his hat. 'Well, I was just going to inquire of Miss Emily,' he said, 'if she wouldn't rather have the poor thing buried under one of the nectarine trees. They ain't been doing very well of late.' He said it was

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a pretty spot, and that he would put up a sort of stone. Poor Emily didn't seem to care much where the animal was buried by that time, so we left them arguing the question. I forget how it was settled; but I know we neither of us ate either strawberries or nectarines for the next two years."

"There is a time for everything," agreed the Philosopher. "With the lover, penning poetry to the wondrous red and white upon his mistress' cheek, we do not discuss the subject of pigment in the blood, its cause and probable duration. Nevertheless, the subject is interesting."

"We men and women," continued the Minor Poet, "we are Nature's favourites, her hope, for whom she has made sacrifice, putting aside so many of her own convictions, telling herself she is old-fashioned. She has let us go from her to the strange school where they laugh at all her notions. We have learnt new, strange ideas that bewilder the good dame. Yet, returning home, it is curious to notice how little, in the few essential

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things of life, we differ from her other children, who have never wandered from her side. Our vocabulary has been extended and elaborated, yet face to face with the realities of existence it is unavailing. Claspings the living, standing beside the dead, our language still is but a cry. Our wants have grown more complicated; the ten-course banquet, with all that it involves, has substituted itself for the handful of fruit and nuts gathered without labour; the stalled ox and a world of trouble for the dinner of herbs and leisure therewith. Are we so far removed thereby above our little brother, who, having swallowed his simple, succulent worm, mounts a neighbouring twig and with easy digestion carols thanks to God? The square brick box about which we move, hampered at every step by wooden lumber, decked with many rags and strips of coloured paper, cumbered with odds and ends of melted flint and moulded clay, has replaced the cheap, convenient cave. We clothe ourselves in the skins of other animals instead of allowing our own to develop into a natural protection. We

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hang about us bits of stone and metal, but underneath it all we are little two-legged animals, struggling with the rest to live and breed. Beneath each hedgerow in the spring-time we can read our own romances in the making—the first faint stirring of the blood, the roving eye, the sudden marvellous discovery of the indispensable She, the wooing, the denial, hope, coquetry, despair, contention, rivalry, hate, jealousy, love, bitterness, victory, and death. Our comedies, our tragedies, are being played upon each blade of grass. In fur and feather we run epitomised.”

“I know,” said the Woman of the World; “I have heard it all so often. It is nonsense. I can prove it to you.”

“That is easy,” observed the Philosopher. “The Sermon on the Mount itself has been proved nonsense—among others, by a bishop. Nonsense is the reverse side of the pattern—the tangled ends of the thread that Wisdom weaves.”

“There was a Miss Askew at the College,” said the Girton Girl. “She agreed with

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every one. With Marx she was a Socialist, with Carlyle a believer in benevolent despotism, with Spinoza a materialist, with Newman almost a fanatic. I had a long talk with her before she left, and tried to understand her; she was an interesting girl. 'I think,' she said, 'I could choose among them if only they would answer one another. But they don't. They won't listen to one another. They only repeat their own case.' "

"There never is an answer," explained the Philosopher. "The kernel of every sincere opinion is truth. This life contains only the questions—the solutions to be published in a future issue."

"She was a curious sort of young woman," smiled the Girton Girl; "we used to laugh at her."

"I can quite believe it," commented the Philosopher.

"It is so like shopping," said the Old Maid.

"Like shopping!" exclaimed the Girton Girl.

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The Old Maid blushed. "I was merely thinking," she said. "It sounds foolish. The idea occurred to me."

"You were thinking of the difficulty of choosing," I suggested.

"Yes," answered the Old Maid. "They will show you so many different things, one is quite unable—at least, I know it is so in my own case. I get quite angry with myself. It seems so weak-minded, but I cannot help it. This very dress I have on now—"

"It is very charming," said the Woman of the World, "in itself. I have been admiring it. Though I confess I think you look even better in dark colours."

"You are quite right," replied the Old Maid; "myself, I hate it. But you know how it is. I seemed to have been all the morning in the shop. I felt so tired. If only—"

The Old Maid stopped abruptly. "I beg your pardon," she said, "I'm afraid I've interrupted."

"I am so glad you told us," said the

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Philosopher. "Do you know that seems to me an explanation."

"Of what?" asked the Girton Girl.

"Of how so many of us choose our views," returned the Philosopher; "we don't like to come out of the shop without something."

"But you were about to explain," continued the Philosopher, turning to the Woman of the World,— "to prove a point."

"That I had been talking nonsense," reminded her the Minor Poet; "if you are sure it will not weary you."

"Not at all," answered the Woman of the World; "it is quite simple. The gifts of civilisation cannot be the meaningless rubbish you advocates of barbarism would make out. I remember Uncle Paul bringing us home a young monkey he had caught in Africa. With the aid of a few logs we fitted up a sort of stage-tree for this little brother of mine, as I suppose you would call him, in the gun-room. It was an admirable imitation of the thing to which he and his ancestors must have been for thousands of years

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accustomed; and for the first two nights he slept perched among its branches. On the third the little brute turned the poor cat out of its basket and slept on eiderdown, after which no more tree for him, real or imitation. At the end of three months, if we offered him monkey-nuts, he would snatch them from our hand and throw them at our head. He much preferred gingerbread and weak tea with plenty of sugar; and when we wanted him to leave the kitchen fire and enjoy a run in the garden, we had to carry him out swearing—I mean he was swearing, of course. I quite agree with him. I much prefer this chair on which I am sitting—this ‘wooden lumber,’ as you term it—to the most comfortable lump of old red sandstone that the best furnished cave could possibly afford; and I am degenerate enough to fancy that I look very nice in this frock—much nicer than my brothers or sisters to whom it originally belonged; they didn’t know how to make the best of it.”

“You would look charming anyhow,” I murmured with conviction, “even—”

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"I know what you are going to say," interrupted the Woman of the World; "please don't. It's very shocking, and, besides, I don't agree with you. I should have had a thick, coarse skin, with hair all over me, and nothing by way of a change."

"I am contending," said the Minor Poet, "that what we choose to call civilisation has done little beyond pandering to our animal desires. Your argument confirms my theory. Your evidence in support of civilisation comes to this—that it can succeed in tickling the appetites of a monkey. You need not have gone back so far. The noble savage of to-day flings aside his clear spring water to snatch at the missionary's gin. He will even discard his feathers, which at least were picturesque, for a chimney-pot hat innocent of nap. Plaid trousers and cheap champagne follow in due course. Where is the advancement? Civilisation provides us with more luxuries for our bodies. That I grant you. Has it brought us any real improvement that could not have been arrived at sooner by other roads?"

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"It has given us Art," said the Girton Girl.

"When you say 'us,' replied the Minor Poet, "I presume you are referring to the one person in half a million to whom Art is anything more than a name. Dismissing the countless hordes who have absolutely never heard the word, and confining attention to the few thousands scattered about Europe and America who prate of it, how many of even these do you think it really influences, entering into their lives, refining, broadening them? Watch the faces of the thin but conscientious crowd streaming wearily through our miles of picture galleries and art museums; gaping, with guide-book in hand, at ruined temple or cathedral tower; striving, with the spirit of the martyr, to feel enthusiasm for Old Masters at which, left to themselves, they would enjoy a good laugh—for chipped statues which, uninstructed, they would have mistaken for the damaged stock of a suburban tea-garden. Not more than one in twelve enjoys what he is looking at, and he by no

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means is bound to be the best of the dozen. Nero was a genuine lover of Art; and in modern times August the Strong, of Saxony, 'the man of sin,' as Carlyle calls him, has left undeniable proof behind him that he was a connoisseur of the first water. One recalls names even still more recent. Are we so sure that Art *does* elevate?"

"You are talking for the sake of talking," told him the Girton Girl.

"One can talk for the sake of thinking also," reminded her the Minor Poet. "The argument is one that has to be faced. But admitting that Art has been of service to mankind on the whole, that it possesses one-tenth of the soul-forming properties claimed for it in the advertisements—which I take to be a generous estimate—its effect upon the world at large still remains infinitesimal."

"It works down," maintained the Girton Girl. "From the few it spreads to the many."

"The process appears to be somewhat slow," answered the Minor Poet. "The result, for whatever it may be worth, we might have

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obtained sooner by doing away with the middleman."

"What middleman?" demanded the Girton Girl.

"The artist," explained the Minor Poet; "the man who has turned the whole thing into a business, the shopman who sells emotions over the counter. A Corot, a Turner is, after all, but a poor apology compared with a walk in spring through the Black Forest or the view from Hampstead Heath on a November afternoon. Had we been less occupied acquiring 'the advantages of civilisation,' working upward through the weary centuries to the city slum, the corrugated-iron-roofed farm, we might have found time to learn to love the beauty of the world. As it is, we have been so busy 'civilising' ourselves that we have forgotten to live. We are like an old lady I once shared a carriage with across the Simplon Pass."

"By the way," I remarked, "one is going to be saved all that bother in the future. They have nearly completed the new railway

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line. One will be able to go from Domo d'Orsola to Brieg in a little over the two hours. They tell me the tunnelling is wonderful."

"It will be very charming," sighed the Minor Poet. "I am looking forward to a future when, thanks to 'civilisation,' travel will be done away with altogether. We shall be sewn up in a sack and shot there. At the time I speak of we still had to be content with the road winding through some of the most magnificent scenery in Switzerland. I rather enjoyed the drive myself, but my companion was quite unable to appreciate it. Not because she did not care for scenery. As she explained to me, she was passionately fond of it. But her luggage claimed all her attention. There were seventeen pieces of it altogether, and every time the ancient vehicle lurched or swayed, which on an average was once every thirty seconds, she was in terror lest one or more of them should be jerked out. Half her day was taken up in counting them and rearranging them, and the only view in

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which she was interested was the cloud of dust behind us. One bonnet-box did contrive during the course of the journey to make its escape, after which she sat with her arms round as many of the remaining sixteen articles as she could encompass, and sighed."

"I knew an Italian countess," said the Woman of the World; "she had been at school with mamma. She never would go half a mile out of her way for scenery. 'Why should I?' she would say. 'What are the painters for? If there is anything good, let them bring it to me and I will look at it.' She said she preferred the picture to the real thing, it was so much more artistic. In the landscape itself, she complained, there was sure to be a chimney in the distance, or a restaurant in the foreground, that spoilt the whole effect. The artist left it out. If necessary, he could put in a cow or a pretty girl to help the thing. The actual cow, if it happened to be there at all, would probably be standing the wrong way round; the girl, in all likelihood, would be fat and plain, or be wearing

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the wrong hat. The artist knew precisely the sort of girl that ought to be there, and saw to it that she was there, with just the right sort of hat. She said she had found it so all through life—the poster was always an improvement on the play.”

“It is rapidly coming to that,” answered the Minor Poet. “Nature, as a well-known painter once put it, is not ‘creeping up’ fast enough to keep pace with our ideals. In advanced Germany they improve the waterfalls and ornament the rocks. In Paris they paint the babies’ faces.”

“You can hardly lay the blame for that upon civilisation,” pleaded the Girton Girl. “The ancient Briton had a pretty taste in woads.”

“Man’s first feeble steps upon the upward path of art,” assented the Minor Poet, “culminating in the rouge-pot and the hair-dye.”

“Come!” laughed the Old Maid, “you are narrow-minded. Civilisation has given us music. Surely you will admit that has been of help to us?”

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"My dear lady," replied the Minor Poet, "you speak of the one accomplishment with which civilisation has had little or nothing to do, the one art that Nature has bestowed upon man in common with the birds and insects, the one intellectual enjoyment we share with the entire animal creation, excepting only the canines; and even the howling of the dog—one cannot be sure—may be an honest, however unsatisfactory, attempt towards a music of his own. I had a fox terrier once who invariably howled in tune. Jubal hampered, not helped us. He it was who stifled music with the curse of professionalism; so that now, like shivering shop-boys paying gate-money to watch games they cannot play, we sit mute in our stalls listening to the paid performer. But for the musician, music might have been universal. The human voice is still the finest instrument that we possess. We have allowed it to rust, the better to hear clever manipulators blow through tubes and twang wires. The musical world might have been a literal expression. Civili-

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sation has contracted it to designate a coterie."

"By the way," said the Woman of the World, "talking of music, have you heard that last symphony of Grieg's? It came in the last parcel. I have been practising it."

"Oh, do let us hear it," urged the Old Maid. "I love Grieg."

The Woman of the World rose and opened the piano.

"Myself, I have always been of opinion—" I remarked.

"Please don't chatter," said the Minor Poet.

CHAPTER III

“**I** NEVER liked her,” said the Old Maid; “I always knew she was heartless.”

“To my thinking,” said the Minor Poet, “she has shown herself a true woman.”

“Really,” said the Woman of the World, laughing, “I shall have to nickname you Dr. Johnson Redivivus. I believe, were the subject under discussion, you would admire the coiffure of the Furies. It would occur to you that it must have been naturally curly.”

“It is the Irish blood flowing in his veins,” I told them. “He must always be ‘agin the Government.’ ”

“We ought to be grateful to him,” remarked the Philosopher. “What can be more uninteresting than an agreeable conversation—I mean, a conversation where everybody is in agreement? Disagreement, on the other hand, is stimulating.”

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"Maybe that is the reason," I suggested, "why modern society is so tiresome an affair. By tabooing all difference of opinion we have eliminated all zest from our intercourse. Religion, sex, politics—any subject on which man really thinks, is scrupulously excluded from all polite gatherings. Conversation has become a chorus; or, as a writer wittily expressed it, the pursuit of the obvious to no conclusion. When not occupied with mumbling, 'I quite agree with you'—'As you say'—'That is precisely my opinion'—we sit about and ask each other riddles: 'What did the Pro-Boer?' 'Why did Julius Cæsar?' "

"Fashion has succeeded where Force for centuries has failed," added the Philosopher. "One notices the tendency even in public affairs. It is bad form nowadays to belong to the Opposition. The chief aim of the Church is to bring itself into line with worldly opinion. The Nonconformist Conscience grows every day a still smaller voice."

"I believe," said the Woman of the World, "that was the reason why Emily never got

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on with poor dear George. He agreed with her in everything. She used to say it made her feel such a fool."

"Man is a fighting animal," explained the Philosopher. "An officer lately returned from South Africa was telling me only the other day: he was with a column, and news came in that a small commando was moving in the neighbourhood. The column set off in the highest of spirits, and after three days' trying work through a difficult country came up with, as they thought, the enemy. As a matter of fact, it was not the enemy, but a troop of Imperial Yeomanry that had lost its way. My friend informs me that the language with which his column greeted those unfortunate Yeomen—their fellow-countrymen, men of their own blood—was most unsympathetic."

"Myself, I should hate a man who agreed with me," said the Girton Girl.

"My dear," replied the Woman of the World, "I don't think any would."

"Why not?" demanded the Girton Girl.

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"I was thinking more of you, dear," replied the Woman of the World.

"I am glad you all concur with me," murmured the Minor Poet. "I have always myself regarded the Devil's Advocate as the most useful officer in the Court of Truth."

"I remember being present one evening," I observed, "at a dinner-party where an eminent judge met an equally eminent Q.C., whose client the judge that very afternoon had condemned to be hanged. 'It is always a satisfaction,' remarked to him genially the judge, 'condemning any prisoner defended by you. One feels so absolutely certain he was guilty.' The Q.C. responded that he should always remember the judge's words with pride."

"Who was it," asked the Philosopher, "who said: 'Before you can attack a lie, you must strip it of its truth'?"

"It sounds like Emerson," I ventured.

"Very possibly," assented the Philosopher; "very possibly not. There is much in

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reputation. Most poetry gets attributed to Shakespeare."

"I entered a certain drawing-room about a week ago," I said. "'We were just speaking about you,' exclaimed my hostess. 'Is not this yours?' She pointed to an article in a certain magazine lying open on the table. 'No,' I replied; 'one or two people have asked me that same question. It seems to me rather an absurd article,' I added. 'I cannot say I thought very much of it,' agreed my hostess."

"I can't help it," said the Old Maid. "I shall always dislike a girl who deliberately sells herself for money."

"But what else is there to sell herself for?" asked the Minor Poet.

"She should not sell herself at all," retorted the Old Maid, with warmth. "She should give herself, for love."

"Are we not in danger of drifting into a difference of opinion concerning the meaning of words merely?" replied the Minor Poet. "We have all of us, I suppose, heard the story of the Jew clothier remonstrated with by the

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Rabbi for doing business on the Sabbath. 'Doing business!' retorted the accused with indignation; 'you call selling a suit like that for eighteen shillings doing business! Why, it's charity!' This 'love' for which the maiden gives herself—let us be a little more exact—does it not include, as a matter of course, material more tangible? Would not the adored one look somewhat astonished on discovering that, having given herself for 'love,' love was all that her lover proposed to give for her? Would she not naturally exclaim: 'But where's the house, to say nothing of the fittings? And what are we to live on?' "

"It is you now who are playing with words," asserted the Old Maid. "The greater includes the less. Loving her, he would naturally desire—"

"With all his worldly goods her to endow," completed for her the Minor Poet. "In other words, he pays a price for her. So far as love is concerned, they are quits. In marriage, the man gives himself to the woman as the woman gives herself to the

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man. Man has claimed, I am aware, greater liberty for himself; but the claim has always been vehemently repudiated by woman. She has won her case. Legally and morally now husband and wife are bound by the same laws. This being so, her contention that she gives herself falls to the ground. She exchanges herself. Over and above, she alone of the twain claims a price."

"Say a living wage," corrected the Philosopher. "Lazy rubbish lolls in petticoats, and idle stupidity struts in trousers. But, class for class, woman does her share of the world's work. Among the poor, of the two it is she who labours the longer. There is a many-versed ballad popular in country districts. Often I have heard it sung in shrill, piping voice at harvest supper or barn dance. The chorus runs—

" 'A man's work 'tis till set of sun,
But a woman's work is never done! ' "

"My housekeeper came to me a few months ago," said the Woman of the World, "to tell me that my cook had given notice.

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'I am sorry to hear it,' I answered; 'has she found a better place?' 'I am not so sure about that,' answered Markham; 'she's going as general servant.' 'As general servant!' I exclaimed. 'To old Hudson, at the coal wharf,' answered Markham. 'His wife died last year, if you remember. He's got seven children, poor man, and no one to look after them.' 'I suppose you mean,' I said, 'that she's marrying him.' 'Well, that's the way she puts it,' laughed Markham. 'What I tell her is, she's giving up a good home and £50 a year to be a general servant on nothing a week. But they never see it.' "

"I recollect her," answered the Minor Poet, "a somewhat depressing lady. Let me take another case. You possess a remarkably pretty housemaid—Edith, if I have it rightly."

"I have noticed her," remarked the Philosopher. "Her manners strike me as really quite exceptional."

"I never could stand any one about me with carroty hair," remarked the Girton Girl.

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"I should hardly call it carrotty," contended the Philosopher. "There is a golden tint of much richness underlying, when you look closely."

"She is a very good girl," agreed the Woman of the World; "but I am afraid I shall have to get rid of her. The other women servants don't get on with her."

"Do you know whether she is engaged or not?" demanded the Minor Poet.

"At the present moment," answered the Woman of the World, "she is walking out, I believe, with the eldest son of the 'Blue Lion.' But she is never adverse to a change. If you are really in earnest about the matter—"

"I was not thinking of myself," said the Minor Poet. "But suppose some young gentleman of personal attractions equal to those of the 'Blue Lion,' or even not quite equal, possessed of two or three thousand a year, were to enter the lists, do you think the 'Blue Lion' would stand much chance?"

"Among the Upper Classes," continued

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the Minor Poet, "opportunity for observing female instinct hardly exists. The girl's choice is confined to lovers able to pay the price demanded, if not by the beloved herself, by those acting on her behalf. But would a daughter of the Working Classes ever hesitate, other things being equal, between Mayfair and Seven Dials?"

"Let me ask you one," chimed in the Girton Girl. "Would a bricklayer hesitate any longer between a duchess and a scullery-maid?"

"But duchesses don't fall in love with bricklayers," returned the Minor Poet. "Now, why not? The stockbroker flirts with the barmaid—cases have been known; often he marries her. Does the lady out shopping ever fall in love with the waiter at the bun-shop? Hardly ever. Lordlings marry ballet girls, but ladies rarely put their heart and fortune at the feet of the Lion Comique. Manly beauty and virtue are not confined to the House of Lords and its dependencies. How do you account for the

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fact that while it is common enough for the man to look beneath him, the woman will almost invariably prefer her social superior, and certainly never tolerate her inferior? Why should King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid appear to us a beautiful legend, while Queen Cophetua and the Tramp would be ridiculous?"

"The simple explanation is," expounded the Girton Girl, "woman is so immeasurably man's superior that only by weighting him more or less heavily with worldly advantages can any semblance of balance be obtained."

"Then," answered the Minor Poet, "you surely agree with me that woman is justified in demanding this 'make-weight.' The woman gives her love, if you will. It is the art treasure, the gilded vase thrown in with the pound of tea; but the tea has to be paid for."

"It all sounds very clever," commented the Old Maid; "yet I fail to see what good comes of ridiculing a thing one's heart tells one is sacred."

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"Do not be so sure I am wishful to ridicule," answered the Minor Poet. "Love is a wondrous statue God carved with His own hands and placed in the Garden of Life, long ago. And man, knowing not sin, worshipped her, seeing her beautiful. Till the time came when man learnt evil; then saw that the statue was naked, and was ashamed of it. Since when he has been busy, draping it, now in the fashion of this age, now in the fashion of that. We have shod her in dainty bottines, regretting the size of her feet. We employ the best artistes to design for her cunning robes that shall disguise her shape. Each season we fix fresh millinery upon her changeless head. We hang around her robes of woven words. Only the promise of her ample breasts we cannot altogether hide, shocking us not a little; only that remains to tell us that beneath the tawdry tissues still stands the changeless statue God carved with His own hands."

"I like you better when you talk like

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that," said the Old Maid; "but I never feel quite sure of you. All I mean, of course, is that money should not be her first consideration. Marriage for money—it is not marriage; one cannot speak of it. Of course, one must be reasonable."

"You mean," persisted the Minor Poet, "you would have her think also of her dinner, of her clothes, her necessities, luxuries."

"It is not only for herself," answered the Old Maid.

"For whom?" demanded the Minor Poet.

The white hands of the Old Maid fluttered on her lap, revealing her trouble; for of the old school is this sweet friend of mine.

"There are the children to be considered," I explained. "A woman feels it even without knowing. It is her instinct."

The Old Maid smiled on me her thanks.

"It is where I was leading," said the Minor Poet. "Woman has been appointed by Nature the trustee of the children. It is her duty to think of them, to plan for them.

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If in marriage she does not take the future into consideration, she is untrue to her trust."

"Before you go further," interrupted the Philosopher, "there is an important point to be considered. Are children better or worse for a pampered upbringing? Is not poverty often the best school?"

"It is what I always tell James," remarked the Woman of the World, "when he grumbles at the tradesmen's books. If papa could only have seen his way to being a poor man, I feel I should have been a better wife."

"Please don't suggest the possibility," I begged the Woman of the World; "the thought is too bewildering."

"You were never imaginative," replied the Woman of the World.

"Not to that extent," I admitted.

"The best mothers make the worst children," quoted the Girton Girl. "I intend to bear that in mind."

"Your mother was a very beautiful

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character—one of the most beautiful I ever knew,” remarked the Old Maid.

“There is some truth in the saying,” agreed the Minor Poet, “but only because it is the exception; and Nature invariably puts forth all her powers to counteract the result of deviation from her laws. Were it the rule, then the bad mother would be the good mother, and the good mother the bad mother. And—”

“Please don’t go on,” said the Woman of the World. “I was up late last night.”

“I was merely going to show,” explained the Minor Poet, “that all roads lead to the law that the good mother is the best mother. Her duty is to her children, to guard their infancy, to take thought for their equipment.”

“Do you seriously ask us to believe,” demanded the Old Maid, “that the type of woman who does marry for money considers for a single moment any human being but herself?”

“Not consciously, perhaps,” admitted the Minor Poet. “Our instincts, that they may

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guide us easily, are purposely made selfish. The flower secretes honey for its own purposes, not with any sense of charity towards the bee. Man works, as he thinks, for beer and baccy; in reality for the benefit of unborn generations. The woman, in acting selfishly, is assisting Nature's plans. In olden days she chose her mate for his strength. She, possibly enough, thought only of herself; he could best provide for her then simple wants, best guard her from the disagreeable accidents of nomadic life. But Nature, unseen, directing her, was thinking of the savage brood needing still more a bold protector. Wealth now is the substitute for strength. The rich man is the strong man. The woman's heart unconsciously goes out to him.

"Do men never marry for money?" inquired the Girton Girl. "I ask merely for information. Maybe I have been misinformed, but I have heard of countries where the *dot* is considered of almost more importance than the bride."

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"The German officer," I ventured to strike in, "is literally on sale. Young lieutenants are most expensive, and even an elderly colonel costs a girl a hundred thousand marks."

"You mean," corrected the Minor Poet, "costs her father. The Continental husband demands a dowry with his wife, and sees that he gets it. He in his turn has to save and scrape for years to provide each of his daughters with the necessary *dot*. It comes to the same thing precisely. Your argument could only apply were women equally with man a wealth producer. As it is, a woman's wealth is invariably the result of a marriage, either her own or that of some shrewd ancestress. And as regards the heiress, the principle of sale and purchase, if I may be forgiven the employment of common terms, is still more religiously enforced. It is not often that the heiress is given away; stolen she may be occasionally, much to the indignation of Lord Chancellors and other guardians of such property; the thief is

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very properly punished—inprisoned, if need be. If handed over legitimately, her price is strictly exacted, not always in money—that she possesses herself, maybe in sufficiency; it enables her to bargain for other advantages no less serviceable to her children—for title, place, position. In the same way the Neolithic woman, herself of exceptional strength and ferocity, may have been enabled to bestow a thought upon her savage lover's beauty, his prehistoric charm of manner; thus in other directions no less necessary assisting the development of the race."

"I cannot argue with you," said the Old Maid. "I know one case. They were both poor; it would have made no difference to her, but it did to him. Maybe I am wrong, but it seems to me that, as you say, our instincts are given us to guide us. I do not know. The future is in our hands; it does not belong to us. Perhaps it were wiser to listen to the voices that are sent to us."

"I remember a case, also," said the Woman

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of the World. She had risen to prepare the tea, and was standing with her back to us. "Like the woman you speak of, she was poor, but one of the sweetest creatures I have ever known. I cannot help thinking it would have been good for the world had she been a mother."

"My dear lady," cried the Minor Poet, "you help me!"

"I always do, according to you," laughed the Woman of the World. "I appear to resemble the bull that tossed the small boy high into the apple-tree he had been trying all the afternoon to climb."

"It is very kind of you," answered the Minor Poet. "My argument is that woman is justified in regarding marriage as the end of her existence, the particular man as but a means. The woman you speak of acted selfishly, rejecting the crown of womanhood because not tendered to her by hands she had chosen."

"You would have us marry without love?" asked the Girton Girl.

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"With love, if possible," answered the Minor Poet; "without, rather than not at all. It is the fulfilment of the woman's law."

"You would make of us goods and chattels," cried the Girton Girl.

"I would make of you what you are," returned the Minor Poet, "the priestesses of Nature's temple, leading man to the worship of her mysteries. An American humorist has described marriage as the craving of some young man to pay for some young woman's board and lodging. There is no escaping from this definition; let us accept it. It is beautiful—so far as the young man is concerned. He sacrifices himself, deprives himself, that he may give. That is love. But from the woman's point of view? If she accepts thinking only of herself, then it is a sordid bargain on her part. To understand her, to be just to her, we must look deeper. Not sexual, but maternal love is her kingdom. She gives herself not to her lover, but through her lover to the great Goddess of the Myriad Breasts that shadows ever with



"THE PRIESTSSES OF NAIURF'S TEMPLE, LEADING MAN TO THE
WORSHIP OF HER MYSIFRIFIS"

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her guardian wings Life from the outstretched hand of Death."

"She may be a nice enough girl from Nature's point of view," said the Old Maid; "personally, I shall never like her."

CHAPTER IV

“**W**HAT is the time?” asked
the Girton Girl.
I looked at my watch.
“Twenty past four,”

I answered.

“Exactly?” demanded the Girton Girl.

“Precisely,” I replied.

“Strange,” murmured the Girton Girl.

“There is no accounting for it, yet it always is so.”

“What is there no accounting for?” I inquired. “What is strange?”

“It is a German superstition,” explained the Girton Girl, “I learnt it at school. Whenever complete silence falls upon any company, it is always twenty minutes past the hour.”

“Why do we talk so much?” demanded the Minor Poet.

“As a matter of fact,” observed the

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Woman of the World, "I don't think we do—not we, personally, not much. Most of our time we appear to be listening to you."

"Then why do I talk so much, if you prefer to put it that way?" continued the Minor Poet. "If I talked less, one of you others would have to talk more."

"There would be that advantage about it," agreed the Philosopher.

"In all probability, you," returned to him the Minor Poet. "Whether as a happy party we should gain or lose by the exchange, it is not for me to say, though I have my own opinion. The essential remains—that the stream of chatter must be kept perpetually flowing. Why?"

"There is a man I know," I said; "you may have met him, a man named Longrush. He is not exactly a bore. A bore expects you to listen to him. This man is apparently unaware whether you are listening to him or not. He is not a fool. A fool is occasionally amusing—Longrush never. No subject comes amiss to him. Whatever the topic, he

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has something uninteresting to say about it. He talks as a piano-organ grinds out music—steadily, strenuously, tirelessly. The moment you stand or sit him down he begins, to continue ceaselessly till wheeled away in cab or omnibus to his next halting-place. As in the case of his prototype, his rollers are changed about once a month to suit the popular taste. In January he repeats to you Dan Leno's jokes, and gives you other people's opinions concerning the Old Masters at the Guildhall. In June he recounts at length what is generally thought concerning the Academy, and agrees with most people on most points connected with the Opera. If forgetful for a moment—as an Englishman may be excused for being—whether it be summer or winter, one may assure one's self by waiting to see whether Longrush is enthusing over cricket or football. He is always up-to-date. The last new Shakespeare, the latest scandal, the man of the hour, the next nine days' wonder—by the evening Longrush has his roller ready. In my early

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days of journalism I had to write each evening a column for a provincial daily, headed 'What People are Saying.' The editor was precise in his instructions. 'I don't want your opinions; I don't want you to be funny; never mind whether the thing appears to you to be interesting or not. I want it to be real, the things people *are* saying.' I tried to be conscientious. Each paragraph began with 'That.' I wrote the column because I wanted the thirty shillings. Why anybody ever read it, I fail to understand to this day; but I believe it was one of the popular features of the paper. Long-rush invariably brings back to my mind the dreary hours I spent penning that fatuous record."

"I think I know the man you mean," said the Philosopher. "I had forgotten his name."

"I thought it possible you might have met him," I replied. "Well, my Cousin Edith was arranging a dinner party the other day, and, as usual, she did me the honour to ask my

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advice. Generally speaking, I do not give advice nowadays. As a very young man I was generous with it. I have since come to the conclusion that responsibility for my own muddles and mistakes is sufficient. However, I make an exception in Edith's case, knowing that never by any chance will she follow it."

"Speaking of editors," said the Philosopher, "Bates told me at the club the other night that he had given up writing the 'Answers to Correspondents' personally, since discovery of the fact that he had been discussing at some length the attractive topic, 'Duties of a Father,' with his own wife, who is somewhat of a humorist."

"There was the wife of a clergyman my mother used to tell of," said the Woman of the World, "who kept copies of her husband's sermons. She would read him extracts from them in bed, in place of curtain lectures. She explained it saved her trouble. Everything she felt she wanted to say to him he had said himself so much more forcibly."

"The argument always appears to me

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weak," said the Philosopher. "If only the perfect may preach, our pulpits would remain empty. Am I to ignore the peace that slips into my soul when perusing the Psalms, to deny myself all benefit from the wisdom of the Proverbs, because neither David nor Solomon was a worthy casket of the jewels that God had placed in them? Is a temperance lecturer never to quote the self-reproaches of poor Cassio because Master Will Shakespeare, there is evidence to prove, was a gentleman, alas! much too fond of the bottle? The man that beats the drum may be himself a coward. It is the drum that is the important thing to us, not the drummer."

"Of all my friends," said the Woman of the World, "the one who has the most trouble with her servants is poor Jane Meredith."

"I am exceedingly sorry to hear it," observed the Philosopher, after a slight pause. "But forgive me, I really do not see—"

"I beg your pardon," answered the Woman of the World. "I thought everybody knew

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'Jane Meredith.' She writes the 'Perfect Home' column for *The Woman's World*."

"It will always remain a riddle, one supposes," said the Minor Poet. "Which is the real ego—I, the author of 'The Simple Life,' fourteenth edition, three and sixpence net—"

"Don't," pleaded the Old Maid with a smile; "please don't."

"Don't what?" demanded the Minor Poet.

"Don't ridicule it—make fun of it, even though it may happen to be your own. There are parts of it I know by heart. I say them over to myself when— Don't spoil it for me." The Old Maid laughed, but nervously.

"My dear lady," reassured her the Minor Poet, "do not be afraid. No one regards that poem with more reverence than do I. You can have but small conception what a help it is to me also. I, too, so often read it to myself; and when— We understand. As one who turns his back on scenes of riot to drink the moonlight in quiet ways, I go to

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it for sweetness and for peace. So much do I admire the poem, I naturally feel desire and curiosity to meet its author, to know him. I should delight, drawing him aside from the crowded room, to grasp him by the hand, to say to him: 'My dear—my very dear Mr. Minor Poet, I am so glad to meet you! I would I could tell you how much your beautiful work has helped me. This, my dear sir—this is indeed a privilege!' But I can picture so vividly the bored look with which he would receive my gush. I can imagine the contempt with which he, the pure liver, would regard me did he know me—me, the liver of the fool's hot days."

"A short French story I once read somewhere," I said, "rather impressed me. A poet or dramatist—I am not sure which—had married the daughter of a provincial notary. There was nothing particularly attractive about her except her *dot*. He had run through his own small fortune and was in some need. She worshipped him and was, as he used to boast to his friends, the ideal wife

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for a poet. She cooked admirably—a useful accomplishment during the first half dozen years of their married life; and afterwards, when fortune came to him, managed his affairs to perfection, by her care and economy keeping all worldly troubles away from his study door. An ideal *Hausfrau*, undoubtedly, but of course no companion for our poet. So they went their ways; till, choosing as in all things the right moment, when she could best be spared, the good lady died and was buried.

“And here begins the interest of the story, somewhat late. One article of furniture, curiously out of place among the rich appointments of their fine *hôtel*, the woman had insisted on retaining, a heavy, clumsily carved oak desk her father had once used in his office, and which he had given to her for her own as a birthday present back in the days of her teens.

“You must read the story for yourselves if you would enjoy the subtle sadness that surrounds it, the delicate aroma of regret through which it moves. The husband, find-

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ing after some little difficulty the right key, fits it into the lock of the bureau. As a piece of furniture, plain, solid, squat, it has always jarred upon his artistic sense. She, too, his good, affectionate Sara, had been plain, solid, a trifle squat. Perhaps that was why the poor woman had clung so obstinately to the one thing in the otherwise perfect house that was quite out of place there. Ah, well! she is gone now, the good creature. And the bureau—no, the bureau shall remain. Nobody will need to come into this room, no one ever did come there but the woman herself. Perhaps she had not been altogether so happy as she might have been. A husband less intellectual—one from whom she would not have lived so far apart—one who could have entered into her simple, commonplace life! it might have been better for both of them. He draws down the lid, pulls out the largest drawer. It is full of manuscripts, folded and tied neatly with ribbons once gay, now faded. He thinks at first they are his own writings—things begun and discarded, reserved by her with fond-

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ness. She thought so much of him, the good soul! Really, she could not have been so dull as he had deemed her. The power to appreciate rightly—this, at least, she must have possessed. He unties the ribbon. No, the writing is her own, corrected, altered, underlined. He opens a second, a third. Then with a smile he sits down to read. What can they be like, these poems, these stories? He laughs, smooths the crumpled paper, foreseeing the trite commonness, the shallow sentiment. The poor child! So she likewise would have been a *littératureuse*. Even she had her ambition, her dream.

“The sunshine climbs the wall behind him, creeps stealthily across the ceiling of the room, slips out softly by the window, leaving him alone. All these years he had been living with a fellow-poet! They should have been comrades, and they had never spoken. Why had she hidden herself? Why had she left him, never revealing herself? Years ago, when they were first married—he remembers now—she had slipped little blue-bound copy-books

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into his pocket, laughing, blushing, asking him to read them. How could he have guessed? Of course, he had forgotten them. Later, they had disappeared again; it had never occurred to him to think. Often in the earlier days she had tried to talk to him about his work. Had he but looked into her eyes, he might have understood. But she had always been so homely seeming, so good. Who would have suspected? Then suddenly the blood rushes into his face. What must have been her opinion of his work? All these years he had imagined her the amazed devotee, uncomprehending but admiring. He had read to her at times, comparing himself the while with Molière reading to his cook. What right had she to play this trick upon him? The folly of it! The pity of it! He would have been so glad of her."

"What becomes, I wonder," mused the Philosopher, "of the thoughts that are never spoken. We know that in Nature nothing is wasted; the very cabbage is immortal, living again in altered form. A thought

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published or spoken we can trace, but such must only be a small percentage. It often occurs to me walking down the street. Each man and woman that I pass by, each silently spinning his silken thought, short or long, fine or coarse. What becomes of it?"

"I heard you say once," remarked the Old Maid to the Minor Poet, "that 'thoughts are in the air,' that the poet but gathers them as a child plucks wayside blossoms to shape them into nosegays."

"It was in confidence," replied the Minor Poet. "Please do not let it get about, or my publisher will use it as an argument for cutting down my royalties."

"I have always remembered it," answered the Old Maid. "It seemed so true. A thought suddenly comes to you. I think of them sometimes, as of little motherless babes creeping into our brains for shelter."

"It is a pretty idea," mused the Minor Poet. "I shall see them in the twilight; pathetic little round-eyed things of goblin shape, dimly luminous against the darkening

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air. Whence come you, little tender Thought, tapping at my brain? From the lonely forest, where the peasant mother croons above the cradle while she knits? Thought of Love and Longing; lies your gallant father with his boyish eyes unblinking underneath some tropic sun? Thought of Life and Thought of Death; are you of patrician birth, cradled by some high-born maiden, pacing slowly some sweet garden? Or did you spring to life amid the din of loom or factory? Poor little nameless foundlings! I shall feel myself in future quite a philanthropist, taking them in, adopting them."

"You have not yet decided," reminded him the Woman of the World, "which you really are: the gentleman we get for three-and-sixpence net, or the one we are familiar with, the one we get for nothing.

"Please don't think I am suggesting any comparison," continued the Woman of the World, "but I have been interested in the question since George joined a Bohemian club and has taken to bringing down minor

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celebrities from Saturday to Monday. I hope I am not narrow-minded, but there is one gentleman I have been compelled to put my foot down on."

"I really do not think he will complain," I interrupted. The Woman of the World possesses, I should explain, the daintiest of feet.

"It is heavier than you think," replied the Woman of the World. "George persists I ought to put up with him because he is a true poet. I cannot admit the argument. The poet I honestly admire. I like to have him about the place. He lies on my drawing-room table in white vellum, and helps to give tone to the room. For the poet I am quite prepared to pay the four-and-six demanded; the man I don't want. To be candid, he is not worth his own discount."

"It is hardly fair," urged the Minor Poet, "to confine the discussion to poets. A friend of mine some years ago married one of the most charming women in New York, and that is saying a good deal. Everybody congratulated him, and at the outset he was pleased

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enough with himself. I met him two years later in Geneva, and we travelled together as far as Rome. He and his wife scarcely spoke to one another the whole journey, and before I left him he was good enough to give me advice which to another man might be useful. 'Never marry a charming woman,' he counselled me. 'Anything more unutterably dull than "the charming woman" outside business hours you cannot conceive.' "

"I think we must agree to regard the preacher," concluded the Philosopher, "merely as a brother artist. The singer may be a heavy, fleshy man with a taste for beer, but his voice stirs our souls. The preacher holds aloft his banner of purity. He waves it over his own head as much as over the heads of those around him. He does not cry with the Master, 'Come to Me,' but 'Come with me, and be saved.' The prayer 'Forgive them' was the prayer not of the Priest, but of the God. The prayer dictated to the Disciples was 'Forgive us,' 'Deliver us.' Not that he should be braver, not that he

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should be stronger than they that press behind him, is needed of the leader, but that he should know the way. He, too, may faint, he, too, may fall; only he alone must never turn his back."

"It is quite comprehensible, looked at from one point of view," remarked the Minor Poet, "that he who gives most to others should himself be weak. The professional athlete pays, I believe, the price of central weakness. It is a theory of mine that the charming, delightful people one meets with in society are people who have dishonestly kept to themselves gifts entrusted to them by Nature for the benefit of the whole community. Your conscientious, hard-working humourist is in private life a dull dog. The dishonest trustee of laughter, on the other hand, robbing the world of wit bestowed upon him for public purposes, becomes a brilliant conversationalist."

"But," added the Minor Poet, turning to me, "you were speaking of a man named Longrush, a great talker."

"A long talker," I corrected. "My cousin

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mentioned him third in her list of invitations. 'Longrush,' she said with conviction, 'we must have Longrush.' 'Isn't he rather tiresome?' I suggested. 'He is tiresome,' she agreed, 'but then he's so useful. He never lets the conversation drop.' "

"Why is it?" asked the Minor Poet. "Why, when we meet together, must we chatter like a mob of sparrows? Why must every assembly to be successful sound like a parrot-house of a zoological garden?"

"I remember a parrot story," I said, "but I forget who told it to me."

"Maybe one of us will remember as you go on," suggested the Philosopher.

"A man," I said—"an old farmer, if I remember rightly—had read a lot of parrot stories, or had heard them at the club. As a result he thought he would like himself to be the owner of a parrot, so journeyed to a dealer and, according to his own account, paid rather a long price for a choice specimen. A week later he re-entered the shop, the parrot borne behind him by a boy. 'This

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bird,' said the farmer, 'this bird you sold me last week ain't worth a sovereign!' 'What's the matter with it?' demanded the dealer. 'How do I know what's the matter with the bird?' answered the farmer. 'What I tell you is that it ain't worth a sovereign—'tain't worth half-a-sovereign!' 'Why not?' persisted the dealer; 'it talks all right, don't it?' 'Talks!' retorted the indignant farmer, 'the damned thing talks all day, but it never says anything funny!' "

"A friend of mine," said the Philosopher, "once had a parrot—"

"Won't you come into the garden?" said the Woman of the World, rising and leading the way.

CHAPTER V

“MYSELF,” said the Minor Poet, “I read the book with the most intense enjoyment. I found it inspiring—so inspiring, I fear I did not give it sufficient attention. I must read it again.”

“I understand you,” said the Philosopher. “A book that really interests us makes us forget that we are reading. Just as the most delightful conversation is when nobody in particular appears to be talking.”

“Do you remember meeting that Russian man George brought down here about three months ago?” asked the Woman of the World, turning to the Minor Poet. “I forget his name. As a matter of fact, I never knew it. It was quite unpronounceable and, except that it ended, of course, with a double f, equally impossible to spell. I told him frankly at the beginning I should call him by

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his Christian name, which fortunately was Nicholas. He was very nice about it."

"I remember him distinctly," said the Minor Poet. "A charming man."

"He was equally charmed with you," replied the Woman of the World.

"I can credit it easily," murmured the Minor Poet. "One of the most intelligent men I ever met."

"You talked together for two hours in a corner," said the Woman of the World. "I asked him after you had gone what he thought of you. 'Ah! what a talker!' he exclaimed, making a gesture of admiration with his hands. 'I thought maybe you would notice it,' I answered him. 'Tell me, what did he talk about?' I was curious to know; you had been so absorbed in yourselves and so oblivious to the rest of us. 'Upon my word,' he replied, 'I really cannot tell you. Do you know, I am afraid, now I come to think of it, that I must have monopolised the conversation.' I was glad to be able to ease his mind on that point. 'I really don't think you did,'

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I assured him. I should have felt equally confident had I not been present."

"You were quite correct," returned the Minor Poet. "I have a distinct recollection of having made one or two observations myself. Indeed, if I may say so, I talked rather well."

"You may also recollect," continued the Woman of the World, "that the next time we met I asked you what he had said, and that your mind was equally a blank on the subject. You admitted you had found him interesting. I was puzzled at the time, but now I begin to understand. Both of you, no doubt, found the conversation so brilliant, each of you felt it must have been your own."

"A good book," I added—"a good talk is like a good dinner: one assimilates it. The best dinner is the dinner you do not know you have eaten."

"A thing will often suggest interesting thought," observed the Old Maid, "without being itself interesting. Often I find the tears coming into my eyes as I witness some stupid

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melodrama—something said, something hinted at, will stir a memory, start a train of thought.”

“I once,” I said, “sat next to a countryman in the pit of a music-hall some years ago. He enjoyed himself thoroughly up to half-past ten. Songs about mothers-in-law, drunken wives, and wooden legs he roared at heartily. At ten-thirty entered a well-known *artiste* who was then giving a series of what he called ‘Condensed Tragedies in Verse.’ At the first two my country friend chuckled hugely. The third ran: ‘Little boy; pair of skates; broken ice; heaven’s gates.’ My friend turned white, rose hurriedly, and pushed his way impatiently out of the house. I left myself some ten minutes later, and by chance ran against him again in the bar of the ‘Criterion,’ where he was drinking whiskey rather copiously. ‘I couldn’t stand that fool,’ he explained to me in a husky voice. ‘Truth is, my youngest kid got drowned last winter, skating. Don’t see any sense making fun of real trouble.’ ”

“I can cap your story with another,” said

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the Philosopher. "Jim sent me a couple of seats for one of his first nights a month or two ago. They did not reach me till four o'clock in the afternoon. I went down to the club to see if I could pick up anybody. The only man there I knew at all was a rather quiet young fellow, a new member. He had just taken Bates's chambers in Staple Inn—you have met him, I think. He didn't know many people then and was grateful for my invitation. The play was one of those Palais Royal farces—it cannot matter which, they are all exactly alike. The fun consists of somebody's trying to sin without being found out. It always goes well. The British public invariably welcomes the theme, provided it be dealt with in a merry fashion. It is only the serious discussion of evil that shocks us. There was the usual banging of doors and the usual screaming. Everybody was laughing around us. My young friend sat with rather a curious fixed smile upon his face. 'Fairly well constructed,' I said to him, as the second curtain fell amid yells of delight. 'Yes,' he an-

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swered, 'I suppose it's very funny.' I looked at him; he was little more than a boy. 'You are rather young,' I said, 'to be a moralist.' He gave a short laugh. 'Oh! I shall grow out of it in time,' he said. He told me his story later, when I came to know him better. He had played the farce himself over in Melbourne—he was an Australian. Only the third act had ended differently. His girl wife, of whom he was passionately fond, had taken it quite seriously and had committed suicide. A foolish thing to do."

"Man is a beast!" said the Girton Girl, who was prone to strong expression.

"I thought so myself, when I was younger," said the Woman of the World.

"And don't you now, when you hear a thing like that?" suggested the Girton Girl.

"Certainly, my dear," replied the Woman of the World; "there is a deal of the animal in man; but—well, I was myself expressing that same particular view of him, the brute, to a very old lady with whom I was spending a winter in Brussels, many years ago now,

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when I was quite a girl. She had been a friend of my father's, and was one of the sweetest and kindest—I was almost going to say the most perfect woman I have ever met; though as a celebrated beauty, stories, dated from the early Victorian era, were told about her—but myself, I never believed them. Her calm, gentle, passionless face, crowned with its soft, silver hair—I remember my first sight of the Matterhorn on a summer's evening; somehow it at once reminded me of her."

"My dear," laughed the Old Maid, "your anecdotal method is becoming as jerky as a cinematograph."

"I have noticed it myself," replied the Woman of the World; "I try to get in too much."

"The art of the *raconteur*," observed the Philosopher, "consists in avoiding the unessential. I have a friend who never yet to my knowledge reached the end of a story. It is intensely unimportant whether the name of the man who said the thing or did the deed

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be Brown or Jones or Robinson. But she will worry herself into a fever trying to recollect. 'Dear, dear me!' she will leave off to exclaim, 'I know his name so well. How stupid of me!' She will tell you why she ought to recollect his name, how she always has recollected his name till this precise moment. She will appeal to half the people in the room to help her. It is hopeless to try and induce her to proceed, the idea has taken possession of her mind. After a world of unnecessary trouble she recollects that it was Tomkins, and is delighted; only to be plunged again in despair on discovery that she has forgotten his address. This makes her so ashamed of herself she declines to continue, and full of self-reproach she retires to her own room. Later she re-enters, beaming, with the street and number pat. But by that time she has forgotten the anecdote."

"Well, tell us about your old lady, and what it was you said to her," spoke impatiently the Girton Girl, who is always eager when the subject under discussion happens to be

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the imbecility or criminal tendency of the opposite sex.

"I was at the age," continued the Woman of the World, "when a young girl tiring of fairy stories puts down the book and looks round her at the world, and naturally feels indignant at what she notices. I was very severe upon both the shortcomings and the overgoings of man—our natural enemy. My old friend used to laugh, and that made me think her callous and foolish. One day our *bonne*—like all servants a lover of gossip—came to us delighted with a story which proved to me how just had been my estimate of the male animal. The grocer at the corner of our *rue*, married only four years to a charming and devoted little wife, had run away and left her.

" 'He never gave her even a hint, the pretty angel!' so Jeanne informed us. 'Had had his box containing his clothes and everything he wanted ready packed for a week, waiting for him at the railway station—just told her he was going to play a game of dominoes, and

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that she was not to sit up for him; kissed her and the child good-night, and—well, that was the last she ever saw of him. Did Madame ever hear the like of it?’ concluded Jeanne, throwing up her hands to heaven. ‘I am sorry to say, Jeanne, that I have,’ replied my sweet Madame with a sigh, and led the conversation by slow degrees back to the subject of dinner. I turned to her when Jeanne had left the room. I can remember still the burning indignation of my face. I had often spoken to the man myself, and had thought what a delightful husband he was—so kind, so attentive, so proud, seemingly, of his dainty *femme*. ‘Doesn’t that prove what I say,’ I cried, ‘that men are beasts?’ ‘I am afraid it helps in that direction,’ replied my old friend. ‘And yet you defend them,’ I answered. ‘At my age, my dear,’ she replied, ‘one neither defends nor blames; one tries to understand.’ She put her thin white hand upon my head. ‘Shall we hear a little more of the story?’ she said. ‘It is not a pleasant one, but it may be useful to us.’ ‘I don’t want to

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hear any more of it,' I answered; 'I have heard enough.' 'It is sometimes well,' she persisted, 'to hear the whole of a case before forming our judgment.' And she rang the bell for Jeanne. 'That story about our little grocer friend,' she said—'it is rather interesting to me. Why did he leave her and run away—do you know?' Jeanne shrugged her ample shoulders. 'Oh! the old story, Madame,' she answered, with a short laugh. 'Who was she?' asked my friend. 'The wife of Monsieur Savary, the wheelwright, as good a husband as ever a woman had. It's been going on for months, the hussy!' 'Thank you, that will do, Jeanne.' She turned again to me so soon as Jeanne had left the room. 'My dear,' she said, 'whenever I see a bad man, I peep round the corner for the woman. Whenever I see a bad woman, I follow her eyes; I know she is looking for her mate. Nature never makes odd samples.' "

"I cannot help thinking," said the Philosopher, "that a good deal of harm is being

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done to the race as a whole by the overpraise of women."

"Who overpraises them?" demanded the Girton Girl. "Men may talk nonsense to us—I don't know whether any of us are foolish enough to believe it—but I feel perfectly sure that when they are alone most of their time is occupied in abusing us."

"That is hardly fair," interrupted the Old Maid. "I doubt if they do talk about us among themselves as much as we think. Besides, it is always unwise to go behind the verdict. Some very beautiful things have been said about women by men."

"Well, ask them," said the Girton Girl. "Here are three of them present. Now, honestly, when you talk about us among yourselves, do you gush about our virtue, our goodness, our wisdom?"

"'Gush,'" said the Philosopher, reflecting, "'gush' would hardly be the correct word."

"In justice to the truth," I said, "I must admit our Girton friend is to a certain extent

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correct. Every man at some time of his life esteems to excess some one particular woman. Very young men, lacking in experience, admire perhaps indiscriminately. To them, anything in a petticoat is adorable: the milliner makes the angel. And very old men, so I am told, return to the delusions of their youth; but as to this I cannot as yet speak positively. The rest of us—well, when we are alone, it must be confessed, as our Philosopher says, that ‘gush’ is not the correct word.”

“I told you so,” chortled the Girton Girl.

“Maybe,” I added, “it is merely the result of reaction. Convention insists that to her face we show her a somewhat exaggerated deference. Her very follies we have to regard as added charms—the poets have decreed it. Maybe it comes as a relief to let the pendulum swing back.”

“But is it not a fact,” asked the Old Maid, “that the best men and even the wisest are those who have held women in most esteem? Do we not gauge civilisation by the position a nation accords to its women?”

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"In the same way as we judge them by the mildness of their laws, their tenderness for the weak. Uncivilised man killed off the useless members of the tribe; we provide for them hospitals, almshouses. Man's attitude towards woman proves the extent to which he has conquered his own selfishness, the distance he has travelled from the law of the ape: might is right.

"Please don't misunderstand me," pleaded the Philosopher, with a nervous glance towards the lowering eyebrows of the Girton Girl. "I am not saying for a moment woman is not the equal of man; indeed, it is my belief that she is. I am merely maintaining she is not his superior. The wise man honours woman as his friend, his fellow-labourer, his complement. It is the fool who imagines her inhuman."

"But are we not better," persisted the Old Maid, "for our ideals? I don't say we women are perfect—please don't think that. You are not more alive to our faults than we are. Read the women novelists from George Eliot

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downwards. But for your own sake—is it not well man should have something to look up to, and failing anything better—?”

“I draw a very wide line,” answered the Philosopher, “between ideals and delusions. The ideal has always helped man; but that belongs to the land of his dreams, his most important kingdom, the kingdom of his future. Delusions are earthly structures, that sooner or later fall about his ears, blinding him with dust and dirt. The petticoat-governed country has always paid dearly for its folly.”

“Elizabeth!” cried the Girton Girl. “Queen Victoria!”

“Were ideal sovereigns,” returned the Philosopher, “leaving the government of the country to its ablest men. France under its Pompadours, the Byzantine Empire under its Theodoras, are truer examples of my argument. I am speaking of the unwisdom of assuming all women to be perfect. Belisarius ruined himself and his people by believing his own wife to be an honest woman.”

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"But chivalry," I argued, "has surely been of service to mankind?"

"To an immense extent," agreed the Philosopher. "It seized a natural human passion and turned it to good uses. Then it was a reality. So once was the divine right of kings, the infallibility of the Church, for cumbering the ground with the lifeless bodies of which mankind has paid somewhat dearly. Not its upstanding lies—they can be faced and defeated—but its dead truths are the world's stumbling-blocks. To the man of war and rapine, trained in cruelty and injustice, the woman was the one thing that spoke of the joy of yielding. Woman, as compared with man, was then an angel: it was no mere form of words. All the tender offices of life were in her hands. To the warrior, his life divided between fighting and debauchery, his womenfolk tending the sick, helping the weak, comforting the sorrowing, must have moved with white feet across a world his vices had made dark. Her mere subjection to the priesthood, her inborn feminine delight in

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form and ceremony—now an influence narrowing her charity—must then, to his dim eyes, trained to look upon dogma as the living soul of his religion, have seemed a halo, deifying her. Woman was then the servant. It was naturally to her advantage to excite tenderness and mercy in man. Since she has become the mistress of the world. It is no longer her interested mission to soften his savage instincts. Nowadays, it is the women who make war, the women who exalt brute force. To-day it is the woman who, happy herself, turns a deaf ear to the world's low cry of pain; holding that man honoured who would ignore the good of the species to augment the comforts of his own particular family; holding in despite as a bad husband and father the man whose sense of duty extends beyond the circle of the home. One recalls Lady Nelson's reproach to her lord after the battle of the Nile. 'I have married a wife, and therefore cannot come,' is the answer to his God that many a woman has prompted to her lover's tongue. I was speaking to a woman only

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the other day about the cruelty of skinning seals alive. 'I feel so sorry for the poor creatures,' she murmured; 'but they say it gives so much more depth of colour to the fur.' Her own jacket was certainly a very beautiful specimen."

"When I was editing a paper," I said, "I opened my columns to a correspondence on this very subject. Many letters were sent to me—most of them trite, many of them foolish. One, a genuine document, I remember. It came from a girl who for six years had been assistant to a fashionable dressmaker. She was rather tired of the axiom that all women, at all times, are perfection. She suggested that poets and novelists should take service for a year in any large drapery or millinery establishment where they would have an opportunity of studying woman in her natural state, so to speak."

"It is unfair to judge us by what, I confess, is our chief weakness," argued the Woman of the World. "Woman in pursuit of clothes ceases to be human—she reverts to

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the original brute. Besides, dressmakers can be very trying. The fault is not entirely on one side."

"I still fail to be convinced," remarked the Girton Girl, "that woman is overpraised. Not even the present conversation, so far as it has gone, altogether proves your point."

"I am not saying it is the case among intelligent thinkers," explained the Philosopher, "but in popular literature the convention still lingers. To woman's face no man cares to protest against it; and woman, to her harm, has come to accept it as a truism. 'What are little girls made of? Sugar and spice and all that's nice.' In more or less varied form the idea has entered into her blood, shutting out from her hope of improvement. The girl is discouraged from asking herself the occasionally needful question: Am I on the way to become a sound, useful member of society? Or am I in danger of degenerating into a vain, selfish, lazy piece of good-for-nothing rubbish? She is quite content so long as she can detect in herself no tendency to male vices,

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forgetful that there are also feminine vices. Woman is the spoilt child of the age. No one tells her of her faults. The World with its thousand voices flatters her. Sulks, bad temper, and pig-headed obstinacy are translated as 'pretty Fanny's wilful ways.' Cowardice, contemptible in man or woman, she is encouraged to cultivate as a charm. Incompetence to pack her own bag or find her own way across a square and round a corner is deemed an attraction. Abnormal ignorance and dense stupidity entitle her to pose as the poetical ideal. If she give a penny to a street beggar, selecting generally the fraud, or kiss a puppy's nose, we exhaust the language of eulogy, proclaiming her a saint. The marvel to me is that, in spite of the folly upon which they are fed, so many of them grow into sensible women."

"Myself," remarked the Minor Poet, "I find much comfort in the conviction that talk, as talk, is responsible for much less good and much less harm in the world than we who talk

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are apt to imagine. Words to grow and bear fruit must fall upon the earth of fact."

"But you hold it right to fight against folly?" demanded the Philosopher.

"Heavens, yes!" cried the Minor Poet. "That is how one knows it is Folly—if we can kill it. Against the Truth our arrows rattle harmlessly."

CHAPTER VI

“**B**UT what is her reason?” demanded the Old Maid.

“Reason! I don’t believe any of them have any reason.” The Woman of the World showed sign of being short of temper, a condition of affairs startlingly unusual to her. “Says she hasn’t enough work to do.”

“She must be an extraordinary woman,” commented the Old Maid.

“The trouble I have put myself to in order to keep that woman, just because George likes her savouries, no one would believe,” continued indignantly the Woman of the World. “We have had a dinner party regularly once a week for the last six months, entirely for her benefit. Now she wants me to give two. I won’t do it!”

“If I could be of any service?” offered the Minor Poet. “My digestion is not what it

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once was, but I could make up in quality—a *recherché* little banquet twice a week, say on Wednesdays and Saturdays, I would make a point of eating with you. If you think that would content her!"

"It is really thoughtful of you," replied the Woman of the World, "but I cannot permit it. Why should you be dragged from the simple repast suitable to a poet merely to oblige my cook? It is not reason."

"I was thinking rather of you," continued the Minor Poet.

"I've half a mind," said the Woman of the World, "to give up housekeeping altogether and go into an hotel. I don't like the idea, but really servants are becoming impossible."

"It is very interesting," said the Minor Poet.

"I am glad you find it so!" snapped the Woman of the World.

"What is interesting?" I asked the Minor Poet.

"That the tendency of the age," he replied, "should be slowly but surely driving us into

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the practical adoption of a social state that for years we have been denouncing the Socialists for merely suggesting. Everywhere the public houses are multiplying, the private dwellings diminishing."

"Can you wonder at it?" commented the Woman of the World. "You men talk about 'the joys of home.' Some of you write poetry—generally speaking, one of you who lives in chambers, and spends two-thirds of his day at a club." We were sitting in the garden. The attention of the Minor Poet became riveted upon the sunset. "'Ethel and I by the fire.' Ethel never gets a chance of sitting by the fire. So long as you are there, comfortable, you do not notice that she has left the room to demand explanation why the drawing-room scuttle is always filled with slack, and the best coal burnt in the kitchen range. Home to us women is our place of business that we never get away from."

"I suppose," said the Girton Girl—to my surprise she spoke with entire absence of indignation. As a rule, the Girton Girl stands

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for what has been termed "divine discontent" with things in general. In the course of time she will outlive her surprise at finding the world so much less satisfactory an abode than she had been led to suppose—also her present firm conviction that, given a free hand, she could put the whole thing right in a quarter of an hour. There are times even now when her tone suggests less certainty of her being the first person who has ever thought seriously about the matter. "I suppose," said the Girton Girl, "it comes of education. Our grandmothers were content to fill their lives with these small household duties. They rose early, worked with their servants, saw to everything with their own eyes. Nowadays we demand time for self-development, for reading, for thinking, for pleasure. Household drudgery, instead of being the object of our life, has become an interference to it. We resent it."

"The present revolt of woman," continued the Minor Poet, "will be looked back upon by the historian of the future as one of the

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chief factors in our social evolution. The 'home'—the praises of which we still sing, but with gathering misgiving—depended on her willingness to live a life of practical slavery. When Adam delved and Eve spun—Adam confining his delving to the space within his own fence, Eve staying her spinning-wheel the instant the family hosiery was complete—then the home rested upon the solid basis of an actual fact. Its foundations were shaken when the man became a citizen and his interests expanded beyond the domestic circle. Since that moment woman alone has supported the institution. Now she, in her turn, is claiming the right to enter the community, to escape from the solitary confinement of the lover's castle. The 'mansions,' with their common dining-rooms, reading-rooms, their system of common service, are springing up in every quarter; the house, the villa, is disappearing. The story is the same in every country. The separate dwelling, where it remains, is being absorbed into a system. In America, the experimental laboratory of the

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future, the houses are warmed from a common furnace. You do not light the fire, you turn on the hot air. Your dinner is brought round to you in a travelling oven. You subscribe for your valet or your lady's maid. Very soon the private establishment, with its staff of unorganised, quarrelling servants, of necessity either over or underworked, will be as extinct as the lake dwelling or the sandstone cave."

"I hope," said the Woman of the World, "that I may live to see it."

"In all probability," replied the Minor Poet, "you will. I would I could feel as hopeful for myself."

"If your prophecy be likely of fulfilment," remarked the Philosopher, "I console myself with the reflection that I am the oldest of the party. Myself, I never read these full and exhaustive reports of the next century without revelling in the reflection that before they can be achieved I shall be dead and buried. It may be a selfish attitude, but I should be quite unable to face any of the machine-made fu-

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tures our growing guild of seers prognosticate. You appear to me, most of you, to ignore a somewhat important consideration—namely, that mankind is alive. You work out your answers as if he were a sum in rule-of-three: ‘If man in so many thousands of years has done so much in such a direction at this or that rate of speed, what will he be doing—?’ and so on. You forget he is swayed by impulses that can enter into no calculation—drawn hither and thither by powers that can never be represented in your algebra. In one generation Christianity reduced Plato’s republic to an absurdity. The printing-press has upset the unanswerable conclusions of Machiavelli.”

“I disagree with you,” said the Minor Poet.

“The fact does not convince me of my error,” retorted the Philosopher.

“Christianity,” continued the Minor Poet, “gave merely an added force to impulses the germs of which were present in the infant race. The printing-press, teaching us to think

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in communities, has nonplussed to a certain extent the aims of the individual as opposed to those of humanity. Without prejudice, without sentiment, cast your eye back over the panorama of the human race. What is the picture that presents itself? Scattered here and there over the wild, voiceless desert, first the holes and caves, next the rude-built huts, the wigwams, the lake dwellings of primitive man. Lonely, solitary, followed by his dam and brood, he creeps through the tall grass, ever with watchful, terror-haunted eyes satisfies his few desires; communicates, by means of a few grunts and signs, his tiny store of knowledge to his offspring; then, crawling beneath a stone, or into some tangled corner of the jungle, dies and disappears. We look again. A thousand centuries have flashed and faded. The surface of the earth is flecked with strange quivering patches: here, where the sun shines on the wood and sea, close together, almost touching one another; there, among the shadows, far apart. The Tribe has formed itself. The whole tiny mass moves

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forward, halts, runs backward, stirred always by one common impulse. Man has learnt the secret of combination, of mutual help. The City rises. From its stone centre spreads its power; the Nation leaps to life; civilisation springs from leisure; no longer is each man's life devoted to his mere animal necessities. The artificer, the thinker—his fellows shall protect him. Socrates dreams, Phidias carves the marble, while Pericles maintains the law and Leonidas holds the Barbarian at bay. Europe annexes piece by piece the dark places of the earth, gives to them her laws. The Empire swallows the small State; Russia stretches her arm round Asia. In London we toast the union of the English-speaking peoples; in Berlin and Vienna we rub a salamander to the *deutscher Bund*, in Paris we whisper of a communion of the Latin races. In great things so in small. The stores, the huge Emporium displaces the small shopkeeper; the Trust amalgamates a hundred firms; the Union speaks for the worker. The limits of country, of language, are found too nar-

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row for the new ideas. German, American, or English—let what yard of coloured cotton you choose float from the mizzenmast, the business of the human race is their captain. One hundred and fifty years ago old Sam Johnson waited in a patron's anteroom; to-day the entire world invites him to growl his table talk, the while it takes its dish of tea. The poet, the novelist, speak in twenty languages. Nationality—it is the County Council of the future. The world's high roads run turnpike-free from pole to pole. One would be blind not to see the goal towards which we are rushing. At the outside it is but a generation or two off. It is one huge murmuring Hive—one universal Hive just the size of the round earth. The bees have been before us; they have solved the riddle towards which we in darkness have been groping."

The Old Maid shuddered visibly. "What a terrible idea!" she said.

"To us," replied the Minor Poet; "not to those who will come after us. The child

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dreads manhood. To Abraham, roaming the world with his flocks, the life of your modern City man, chained to his office from ten to four, would have seemed little better than penal servitude."

"My sympathies are with the Abrahamitical ideal," observed the Philosopher.

"Mine also," agreed the Minor Poet. "But neither you nor I represent the tendency of the age. We are its curiosities. We, and such as we, serve as the brake regulating the rate of progress. The genus of the species shows itself moving in the direction of the organised community—all life welded together, controlled by one central idea. The individual worker is drawn into the factory. Chippendale to-day would have been employed sketching designs; the chair would have been put together by fifty workers, each one trained to perfection in his own particular department. Why does the hotel, with its five hundred servants, its catering for three thousand mouths, work smoothly, while the desirable family residence, with its two or

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three domestics, remains the scene of waste, confusion, and dispute? We are losing the talent of living alone; the instinct of living in communities is driving it out."

"So much the worse for the community," was the comment of the Philosopher. "Man, as Ibsen has said, will always be at his greatest when he stands alone. To return to our friend Abraham, surely he, wandering in the wilderness, talking with his God, was nearer the ideal than the modern citizen, thinking with his morning paper, applauding silly shibboleths from a theatre pit, guffawing at coarse jests, one of a music-hall crowd? In the community it is the lowest always leads. You spoke just now of all the world inviting Samuel Johnson to its dish of tea. How many read him as compared to the number of subscribers to the *Ha'penny Joker*? This 'thinking in communities,' as it is termed, to what does it lead? To mafficking and Dreyfus scandals. What crowd ever evolved a noble idea? If Socrates and Galileo, Confucius and Christ had 'thought in communities,' the

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world would indeed be the ant-hill you appear to regard as its destiny."

"In balancing the books of life one must have regard to both sides of the ledger," responded the Minor Poet. "A crowd, I admit, of itself creates nothing; on the other hand, it receives ideals into its bosom and gives them needful shelter. It responds more readily to good than to evil. What greater stronghold of virtue than your sixpenny gallery? Your burglar, arrived fresh from jumping on his mother, finds himself applauding with the rest stirring appeals to the inborn chivalry of man. Suggestion that it was right or proper under any circumstances to jump upon one's mother he would at such moment reject with horror. 'Thinking in communities' is good for him. The hooligan, whose patriotism finds expression in squirting dirty water into the face of his coster sweetheart; the *boulevardière*, primed with absinth, shouts '*Conspuez les Juifs!*'—the motive force stirring them in its origin was an ideal. Even into making a fool of itself, a crowd can be

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moved only by incitement of its finer instincts. The service of Prometheus to mankind must not be judged by the statistics of the insurance office. The world as a whole has gained by community, will attain its goal only through community. From the nomadic savage by the winding road of citizenship we have advanced far. The way winds upward still, hidden from us by the mists, but along its tortuous course lies our track into the Promised Land. Not the development of the individual—that is his own concern—but the uplifting of the race would appear to be the law. The lonely great ones, they are the shepherds of the flock—the servants, not the masters of the world. Moses shall die and be buried in the wilderness, seeing only from afar the resting-place of man's tired feet. It is unfortunate that the *Ha'penny Joker* and its kind should have so many readers. Maybe it teaches those to read who otherwise would never read at all. We are impatient, forgetting that the coming and going of our generations are but as the swinging of the pendulum

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of Nature's clock. Yesterrday we booked our seats for gladiatorial shows, for the burning of Christians, our windows for Newgate hangings. Even the musical farce is an improvement upon that—at least, from the humanitarian point of view."

"In the Southern States of America," observed the Philosopher, sticking to his guns, "they run excursion trains to lynching exhibitions. The bull-fight is spreading to France, and English newspapers are advocating the reintroduction of bear-baiting and cock-fighting. Are we not moving in a circle?"

"The road winds, as I have allowed," returned the Minor Poet; "the gradient is somewhat steep. Just now, maybe, we are traversing a backward curve. I gain my faith by pausing now and then to look behind. I see the weary way with many a downward sweep. But we are climbing, my friend, we are climbing."

"But to such a very dismal goal, according to your theory," grumbled the Old Maid. "I should hate to feel myself an insect in a hive,

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my little round of duties apportioned to me, my every action regulated by a fixed law, my place assigned to me, my very food and drink, I suppose, apportioned to me. Do think of something more cheerful."

The Minor Poet laughed. "My dear lady," he replied, "it is too late. The thing is already done. The hive already covers us, the cells are in building. Who leads his own life? Who is master of himself? What can you do but live according to your income in, I am sure, a very charming little cell; buzz about your little world with your cheerful, kindly song, helping these your fellow-insects here, doing day by day the useful offices apportioned to you by your temperament and means, seeing the same faces, treading ever the same narrow circle? Why do I write poetry? I am not to blame. I must live. It is the only thing I can do. Why does one man live and die upon the treeless rocks of Iceland, another labour in the vineyards of the Apennines? Why does one woman make matches, ride in a van to Epping Forest, drink

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gin, and change hats with her lover on the homeward journey; another pant through a dinner-party and half-a-dozen receptions every night from March to June, rush from country house to fashionable Continental resort from July to February, dress as she is instructed by her milliner, say the smart things that are expected of her? Who would be a sweep or a chaperon, were all roads free? Who is it succeeds in escaping the law of the hive? The loafer, the tramp. On the other hand, who is the man we respect and envy? The man who works for the community, the public-spirited man, as we call him; the unselfish man, the man who labours for the labour's sake and not for the profit, devoting his days and nights to learning Nature's secrets, to acquiring knowledge useful to the race. Is he not the happiest, the man who has conquered his own sordid desires, who gives himself to the public good? The hive was founded in dark days, before man knew; it has been built according to false laws. This man will have a cell bigger than any other

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cell; all the other little men shall envy him; a thousand fellow-crawling mites shall slave for him, wear out their lives in wretchedness for him and him alone; all their honey they shall bring to him; he shall gorge while they shall starve. Of what use? He has slept no sounder in his foolishly fanciful cell. Sleep is to tired eyes, not to silken coverlets. We dream in Seven Dials as in Park Lane. His stomach, distend it as he will—it is very small—resents being extended. The store of honey rots. The hive was conceived in the dark days of ignorance, stupidity, brutality. A new hive shall arise.”

“I had no idea,” said the Woman of the World, “you were a Socialist.”

“Nor had I,” agreed the Minor Poet, “before I began talking.”

THE END.

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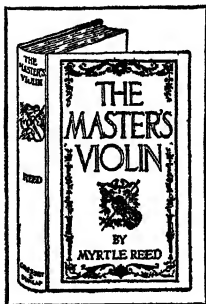
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